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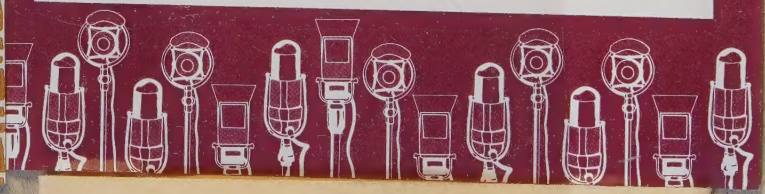

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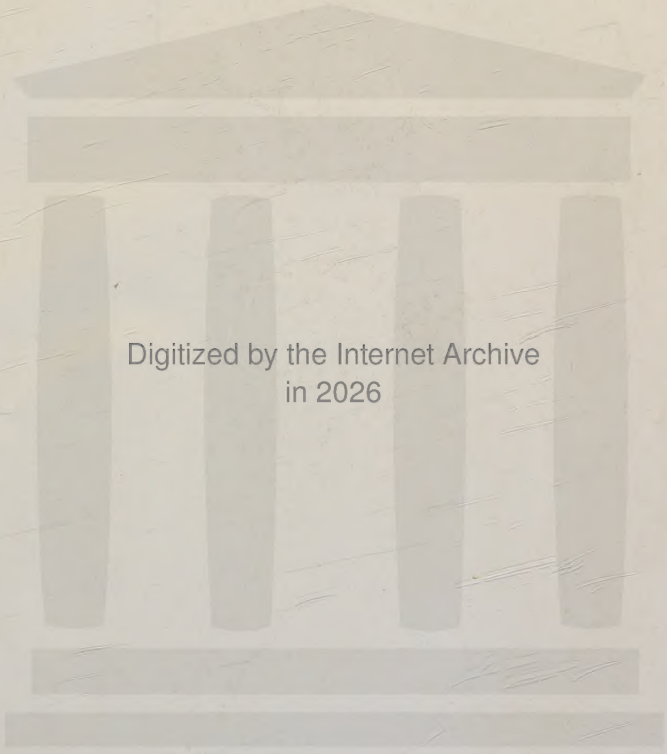

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THE FAMILY—MARJORIE, BABY JANET, MRS. CANTOR, EDNA, NATALIE, MARILYN, AND EDDIE CANTOR AT THE PIANO

MY LIFE
IS IN YOUR HANDS

BY

EDDIE CANTOR

AS TOLD TO

DAVID FREEDMAN

Fully Illustrated

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

1928

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MY LIFE IS IN YOUR HANDS
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FIRST PRINTING, DECEMBER, 1928
SECOND PRINTING, DECEMBER, 1928
THIRD PRINTING, DECEMBER, 1928

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TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER
WHOM I NEVER SAW
AND TO ESTHER
WHO WAS BOTH
TO ME

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WARNING

By

WILL ROGERS

Eddie wants me to write a "Foreword" to this life of his, that he has lived up to the time that the Publishers said, "Thats enough for one life, We cant end the life, but we can end the book". I told Eddie there wasent any use of having a "warning" that the people maby wouldent read the book even if it dident have a foreword or warning.

You see Eddie being an Actor, (I think he mentions it somewhere in here) He was smart enough to not want to start right off with his own stuff, No Actor likes to "Open the Show", that is start off first, They like to have something on ahead of them, They dont care how bad it is, in fact the worse it is the better it makes their stuff look, So that is just the reason I am here, I am the "Dumb" act, or animal act, that starts the show.

Some books have been made by these preliminary "Warnings", But that was when they were awful clever, or were kept awful short.

Its hard to get good writers to write these first page "Warnings", You see you dont get anything for it, and the better writer you are the harder it is to write for nothing, They are generally done out of what is called friendship, But they say "Friendship and business dont mix" and as all of your good stuff that you are able to

sell to some publisher yourself is business, why you dont like to mix it with your friendship.

I never read this book, and am writing this with the distinct understanding I am not to read it, in fact thats the pay that I am getting for the warning, I know his life personally, If this is his real life, Why neither I or any of us ought to read it, and if its not his life I dont want to be dissalusioned, People are like a Cat when it comes to their lives, they have at least nine, and they can pick out the one to write about that they think will look best. I do know that Eddie has had a pretty checkered career, (I will never know why they always speak of careers as "Checkered") He is the only person I know that got to the very top of his profession without going the usual American Magazine route, (Hard work, perseverance, and taking advantage of his oppurtunities).

Knowing how to pick good Lyrics had more to do with it than hard work. I think Eddie has one of the youngest lives that has ever been published, If its a success there will be a great demand to get Autobiographies while they are young, In fact get em before there has really been a chance to learn anything that shouldent be in a Life story, Now his next book will be called "My Life after you read my last life", I may read it, for he will be wealthy during it and thats when a man becomes unconsciously funny is when he becomes rich. When I first met Eddie, neither of us knew whether Zeigfeld had a "Follies" or whether he was maby a Livery stable keeper.

I liked him as a kid, right from the start, I was getting just enough more money than him to feel that I could advise him, I happened to have been with two or three Zeigfeld shows when Eddie joins us in a new one for the first time, He made a bigger hit than either W C Fields or I either one, But still somehow we couldent feel jealous of him, It seemed like the bigger he went the more we liked him, and by the time he was asked to write this, why we are thinking quite a bit of him, But you know I believe that if this fellow hadent got over so big on the stage I would have had about the same regard for him, for it was what happened off the stage that I always liked about him, as much as his wonderful entertaining, There is a lot of sentiment about Eddie, and a lot of fine qualaties, For instance the proceeds of this book all goes to a Boys summer camp that he is interested in and works for and looks after, for poor Kids on the East side that never saw a stretch of country in their lives, So I advise you all to buy this Book, for you will be helping some poor kid to get poisen ivy that would never in the World have had the oppurtunity otherwise.

This Book will fill up just as much space in a book shelf as the life of pretty near any of those other fellows, unless it was Napoleon, or Washington or some of those far sighted old boys that carried writers right with em to make up their lives as they went along.

Now if you want to read any further than this, why go ahead, I have warned you, Stop now! and go get the life

of Josephine, or Peggy Joice, or somebody who has had a life.

But dont say I havent fullfilled my purpose in this book, I have warned you, and I dont think Shakespeare could write a better "foreword" than that, I know he couldent for nothing.

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MY LIFE IS IN YOUR HANDS

Introduction

WHILE most biographies are written about people whose lives are almost ended, I thought I would be original and write about mine, which has hardly begun. It is true I am the father of five children—mostly daughters—in fact, I have as many daughters as I have children; but that is scarcely a sign of infancy. It is rather a sign of a one-track mind. Still, I am only thirty-six, and in these days when science is trying to prolong life indefinitely we will soon reach a point when a person in the thirties will be just old enough to wear bicycle stockings and eat pop corn. If science continues its great work, the only way a man will be able to die a natural death will be to cross the street and be hit by a truck.

However, I have dug up evidence from the Talmud in defense of the old idea that the human span is only three score and ten, or seventy years. Like most defense evidence, it is in the form of a legend. The legend tells that every seven years the individual changes and that in one's life one passes through ten completely different personalities. And now that I am thirty-six and halfway over, I have a strong curiosity to look back and see who the other five Eddies were that I left behind. As I look

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back I am fond of every one of them—although some of them ought to be ashamed of themselves—and after you hear what they were up to, you may wonder, as I often do, how I turned out to be myself instead of a ukulele or something.

In order to make the story a true and complete one I shall conceal nothing. If I thought it would help I could reproduce a set of X-rays I recently took that reveal my innermost self. But besides revealing a patch of pleurisy and the image of my suspender button, these X-rays shed no light on how I became a singing waiter at Carey Walsh's and why I didn't remain one.

I feel that no man's life is sufficiently interesting in itself unless it is in some way a pattern or design created out of the times and reflecting in it bits of other personalities. I have always felt like a part of other people and that other people were a part of me. The dim, brief images of my father and mother have formed an unforgetable picture in my mind, although I never really had the opportunity to know them or even to speak to them, for as my lips were forming into words they were gone. It was through my grandmother that I learned to know them and it was she who reared me through the early years. Grandma Esther is one of my proudest figures before the world.

In trying to recall and restore the five Eddies I have been, I snatch at outstanding bits, high spots that glitter out of the background of the past like the points of stars. Little episodes, long faded, come to life again.

I see myself as a young trouper with Gus Edwards' "Kid Kabaret." Georgie Jessel, Leila Lee, Eddie Buzzell, and George Price were all youngsters in the show. Jessel and I began a friendship then which has lasted to this day, sincere, whole-hearted, always anxious to help each other to succeed—a unique thing in the show business. I was a few years older and big-brothered him. I used to bathe him then, lay out his clothes for the morning, watch over him and being older than the others, I took charge of the railroad tickets when the show traveled. The boys all put on short pants for the train ride and I gave the conductor half-fare tickets. After a while he came back fuming and angry.

"What the hell is the idea?" he growled at me. "Those fellers half fare?" I looked up, innocently surprised.

"What's the matter, conductor?"

"Why," he cried, "they're in the smoking-car, each with a big black cigar in his face, and by the language they use they're older than I am!"

"Boys will be boys!" I murmured with a sigh.

It's wonderful how the most trifling incidents cling to the mind. But it's not wonderful with me. I've got to have a good memory to remember the kind of jokes I tell. As I begin to assemble incidents and experiences I am astonished to find how little I have forgotten. In fact, I can remember the story of my life from about two years before I was born, and I think that's pretty good.

At different stages I see clusters of interesting personalities who were my friends and colleagues. Some of them are celebrated people whom you know, like Will Rogers, W. C. Fields, Marilyn Miller, Fannie Brice, Benny Leonard, Florenz Ziegfeld, Jack Dempsey, and a host of others, among them world-famous figures with whom I had interesting experiences like the late Presidents Wilson and Harding and the Prince of Wales; others are humbler figures of whom you probably never heard but who are just as human, interesting, and important to me. A meeting I once had, in a summer-school recreation center with a little girl, exerted a far greater influence on my life than my signing a contract for five thousand dollars a week which made me the highest-salaried comedian in the musical show business. And that's no lie. For that little girl later became my wife.

It was very hard to make her believe that I would ever get paid for acting. For even when I got my first chance on the Amsterdam roof in the Midnight Frolics, entertaining the four hundred and becoming sociable with the Vanderbilts and the Stotesburys, my wife and I would go back after the show to our bedroom in her sister's flat, where we lived with our two little daughters, Marjorie and Natalie, four people in one room. After the glamour and glitter of the Frolics we would sit in that one room up in the Bronx and wonder whether we'd ever be able to afford a home of our own. Some years later we had the home, but she still doubted. The world of the four hundred was still a far-away dream.

One night I received word in my dressing-room from Rodman Wanamaker to come to a party at his home after the show and meet the Prince of Wales. I had no chance to notify my wife, and when I finally got home it was five o'clock the next morning.

"Where have you been?" she asked with a chilling calm.

"I was with the Prince of Wales."

"Oh, get into bed!" she muttered, angrily. "I suppose tomorrow you'll come home at six in the morning and say you were out all night with President Coolidge!"

While I intend to relate some of my experiences with a number of your favorite celebrities, I wouldn't write a whole biography for that. Nor would I write a book about myself just because I happen to be one comedian who's made a million dollars and has still got it—though that isn't such a bad reason for writing a book—but because I think the story in itself with its human aspects should make a good picture, not only for Fox or Famous, but for a lot of people who would like to follow me through, behind the scenes, in the toughest performance I ever gave in the biggest show I ever played that has had a continuous run for thirty-six years, produced under my personal direction, written by myself and entitled, "The Life of Eddie Cantor."

The curtain rises on chapter one.

Chapter I

MY FATHER, Michael Cantor, was not a successful man as measured by the usual standards. Most successful men devote themselves to a serious life-work and in their spare moments encourage a hobby. My father encouraged only his hobby and overlooked the life-work. His hobby was a slightly damaged, second-hand fiddle which he fingered rather deftly and from which, by the aid of a horse-hair bow that was always shedding, he could on occasion call forth really musical tones; sometimes sprightly, more often plaintive, but always appealing, soothing, like little trickling rivers of memory from a life he might have lived, a life he had built around him of music and dreams to shield him from this strange city he didn't understand, from all the harsh tumult and clatter of iron and steel that were flying up around him.

It never occurred to my father that with such playing he could join the musicians' union and get a job and possibly work up to be a bandmaster like my friend, George Olsen, and run a night club. But that would have made things too easy for me. Besides, I was not yet on the scene to give him the idea. The mere thought of a regular job would make Michael Cantor put his fiddle away for a month and idly walk the streets for weeks to wear off the shock. For my father, in his dreamy, half-dazed fashion, loved life too well to make a business

of it, and being a youth of only twenty at the time, he still cherished illusions.

He must have imagined that the thin voice of his fiddle would some day be heard above the rumble of engines, that his youthful fancies and folk songs would catch the harsh city's ear, and that tenements, tunnels, and skyscrapers would tumble and dissolve into a sweet, country setting like his native village near Minsk and he would sit and serenade the city which had declared a legal holiday just to listen to his song. He was only twenty and married and lived on Eldridge Street, a great street for stables, and he needed dreams like these to keep the smell of his equine neighbors from his nostrils and to justify his idleness, his poverty, and his incurable optimism.

And so in his two-room flat over a Russian tea-house, he lived with Maite, a young, wan creature already sallowed by premature hardships, her face tarnished by the fine yellow dust of the great city, and her young brow perked in pain with thoughts too old for her. Perhaps Maite had hoped to see her Michael some day as the grand maestro leading an orchestra on a gilded platform; perhaps she had secretly aspired to be one of those fine ladies in shiny silks that fluttered like colorful butterflies on the gay white way in New York's midnight sun. She was only one year removed from Michael and still at the time of life when music and laughter are food and air, but she was already approaching motherhood, and all

her thoughts and features settled to the gravity of that prospect.

Cares grew upon her like weeds. Hardly surviving the burden of an early marriage with no resources, she would soon have this new responsibility. She would have to prod the dreamy Michael on, awaken him from his stupor, and hope for the dramatic day when he would shoulder his fiddle like a sack of tools and go out to work. For herself she had never demanded anything. The daily portion came from Providence, not the city, and was often delayed in transit. But for the child it would have to come more regularly. Michael Cantor could not feed an infant on music. Not an infant like me, anyway. Nature provides its newborn with their own capacity for song—I'll tell the world. But Michael seemed oblivious to all necessity. To every complaint of my mother he would set a bar of music and to every entreaty for work he would play a rhapsody.

Work was made for subway-diggers and beam-riveters, but not for Cantors. He had been ordained by a mystic power to play the city's tune, and though the city failed to recognize the tune and though his family would writhe with hunger listening to it, Michael was impelled to play doggedly on.

Maite's mother arrived from Russia to help her only daughter. Maite's mother was one of those rare, precious women born for perpetual toil and perpetual devotion. From the age of thirty she had been a widow and labored to support her three sons and Maite. In her native

Russian province she was known as Esther the Cigar-maker and while Russian cigars never won gold medals at international expositions, Esther's products could be smoked safely and had been lit right after drinking vodka without exploding the smoker. With such modest fame, Esther had managed to build up a small cigar establishment. But when her daughter appealed to her, Esther sold the business cheaply, realizing enough to pay for her passage and bringing a little bag of silver rubles just as the young Cantor couple was sinking into destitution.

For a time the Cantor home brightened up. Esther took care of the house, prepared the meals, and secretly slipped my father a few dollars each week, that he might turn them over to Maite and pretend he had earned them himself. And when young Maite, now twenty-one, took to her bed upon the midwife's advice, the little flat had an air of holiday.

It was the last day of January, 1892, in a small, gas-lit bedroom on Eldridge Street, on a biting cold night usually good for theater audiences, at about the time that the regular overture begins, that I made my début before a packed house. The excited voices of relatives and friends, the clamor of street wagons, the sounds of the Russian balalaika from the tea-house, the muffled groans of my mother and my father's plaintive fiddle, all joined in a strange ovation on my first appearance.

Esther, now a grandma, bustled about, running from the living-room into the bedchamber and back—a matter of two steps—assisting the midwife, serving cakes to

the guests, refilling flasks as fast as they were emptied, while the party of neighbors and well-wishers got sick drinking shlivivitz to my health. Later Grandma Esther, beaming, breathless, perspiring, came to tell them that all was well and, while there was not very much of me, I was the image of my father, only I didn't have a fiddle. At this news all glasses were drained and refilled. Michael cleared the dream mist from his eyes, seemed to realize at least for a moment that he was a father, a progenitor, a man whom the world owed a debt for his accomplishment, after which he was rightfully entitled to spend the rest of his life in undisturbed revery and occasional fiddling. The balalaika below burst into new merriment, the friends and relatives drank again, danced and laughed, as if each had come into a separate fortune, and even Michael felt that a turn had come in the tide of affairs; only I, in the next room, cried with the unfailing instinct of childhood that everything wasn't quite so rosy as they cracked it up to be.

While the guests crowded the little flat it was warm, but after they left it recaptured its dank and chilly atmosphere, and through the cold, hard winter my mother almost never let me out of her arms, wrapping and huddling me close to her to keep me warm. But my father failed to respond to the supreme test. Instead of buckling up and knuckling down, he slumped aside into deeper dreams. I must have been six months old then, but even I turned a pair of big, popping eyes on him with a questioning look, as if to ask, "When do we eat?" But my

father had wasted his years wondering, "When do we play?"

Grandma Esther's little fund had given out, but the good woman took a huge basket of candles, matches, safety-pins and knick-knacks and began to peddle among the housewives, canvassing the tenements from door to door. She walked each day with her load from Cherry to Division Street, through Henry and Madison, until permanent knotted lumps formed on her arms where the basket handle rested.

Maite had hoped that Michael would change. In fits of self-discipline he would get a job, but it never lasted. He could not understand why a man had to work who was born to play the fiddle. Why did a man of twenty-two have to carry the weight of the whole world—we two were the world to him—on his frail, stoop shoulders? But Maite had given up urging him on. Once we had slipped over the brink, we didn't need Newton's law of gravity to figure out how fast we would fall. When I was a little over a year old my mother died in childbirth.

My father was a stunned, distracted man. Grandma Esther, calm in her stoic grief, thought only of his suffering, comforted and cared for him like her own son. But he suddenly grew restive, nervous, excited. He wandered through the streets constantly now, gaping, staring like a man who had lost his way. Somewhere in the midst of the crowded, tangled city he would find her again. He could not believe that she was gone. He would surely come upon her, standing alone on a street corner, waiting

for him, and he would lead her beyond the city limits to a patch of green and sky where they could walk a little in peace, and chat and laugh and have their first real outing. For in spite of all the years of lolling and dreaming, for some reason his life had always been crowded and rushed, and Michael felt that he had never been quite alone with Maite, that he had never had a chance to tell her what she really meant to him and how deeply, genuinely he was fond of her and how much he would like to do to make her happy. But where would he look for her? The streets turned and twined upon each other like a wriggling wilderness of snakes.

The relentless, brutal majesty of fate was wasted on my poor father. He did not understand it; he was afraid to understand it. He only heard voices without faces taunting him, shouting at him, "So you idled and played and to what purpose?" If he could only see who spoke to him and assure these heartless forces of fate that he had meant no harm. But an invisible hand slapped him full in the face and he slumped into bed with a chill and a sharp pain in the chest. His cheeks flushed in indignation and he lay in feverish excitement, mumbling in protest and defiance.

The local lodge doctor held his thin, clammy hand and diagnosed his emotional turmoil as pneumonia. But Michael, who had begun to understand, smiled a dry, yellow smile. "It's not pneumonia, it's music," he murmured, huskily. "It's music!" A rattling wagon clattered by over the cobblestones. Some children blew

on rasping horns. I was then two years old and toddled about, trying to wind the cat's tail around its neck while it howled pitifully. "I tell you it's music," whispered my father, grown old and haggard at twenty-two.

"Mamma Esther, let me play," he entreated, and the sad-faced toil-worn old woman brought the second-hand fiddle from its peeling fiddle-box. Michael took the plaything from her like a child, the wooden instrument with strings that held his secret which the busy, proud city had refused to hear. He tucked the violin under his chin, shakingly moved the bow across the bridge, pulled a few reluctant, complaining tones from its hollow box, and for the moment he was lost in the dreams of song that trickled like little rivers of memory from the life he might have lived. I stood holding my victim cat in a grip around the throat and clutched it tighter, almost strangling it, as with wide, staring eyes and open mouth I watched my father play.

"What's papa doing?" I wondered. "Gimme it!"

"It's music, mine child," said Grandma Esther, stroking my hair.

"Minuzick!" A strange new word with magic meanings. My father was too weak to play and the violin dropped mutely across his chest. Grandma Esther tried to take it from him, but he held it firmly.

"Gimme it!" I cried. "I wanna play too!"

"Not now," pleaded my grandmother, softly. "Some day you'll play like your father."

My father lay back on his pillow, still clinging to his

violin, his eyes slowly closing in that mist which shut the world from his thoughts.

"Michael," murmured Grandma Esther, bending over him tenderly. "Michael!" Then she cried with the muffled anguish of a thousand groans. "Michael! Michael! Answer me! Answer your Mamma Esther!"

"Why don't papa play no more minuzick?" I whimpered, uneasily, clutching at the old woman's dress.

"He's asleep, mine child," Grandma Esther sobbed, and her tears streamed down on my upturned face. "You're an orphan, woe is me! Alone in the world!" And sobbing and weeping, she kissed me through her tears.

Chapter II

I WAS two, and Grandma Esther sixty-two. We were a couple of lonely creatures at the opposite poles of life, one looking forward, the other backward, to the same welter of poverty, adversity, and toil. Other women at her age had earned a brief vacation from their labors, if only to be sick and lie in bed. But my grandmother could not afford the luxury of illness. Her years had been a ceaseless treadmill, grinding, churning, without hope, without end. She had married in her youth to snatch a few years of domestic happiness and leisure. But her young sickly husband needed her help and Esther's only rest from work was on those occasions when she had to be confined. Her husband, soaked with the nicotine and tobacco fumes of his trade, soon died and the burden of support fell with its full weight upon her. When at last her three sons and only daughter married, her duties as a mother and provider ended, only to start again with me. She could not earn enough from peddling candles and matches to rear me as she would like. So from carrying baskets Grandma Esther took to lifting steamer trunks on her back and lugging them up three and four flights as part of her duties in furnishing servant girls to private families.

She conducted a humble employment agency of her own and supplied maids and nurse girls to households, and cooks, dish-washers, and waitresses to small restaurants. She rented two rooms in a basement that were

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combination office and home, as well as temporary lodging-house for the unemployed. Here eight or nine Polish immigrant girls would eat from the common caldron and sleep on the kitchen floor, sprawled over mattresses and covered with brightly patched quilts. And when a Polish maid was provided with a job, Grandma Esther would lift the girl's trunk upon her shoulders and lead the way. Her brokerage fee for each servant was one dollar, later increased to two, but that included the cost of maintaining the girl before she was placed. As my grandmother could not afford the price of a license, she conducted this sadly unlucrative business without it and stood in constant fear of city officials whom competing agencies sent to spy upon her. When a stern-looking inspector quizzed her she would explain that the girls, while of a different nationality, were her blood relations, and overnight I used to get as many as seven sisters and eight first cousins. But finally she amassed the snug fortune of twenty-five dollars to pay for a license so that she could struggle and starve officially.

Even then the agency was obliged to shift its headquarters frequently. Sometimes for a detail like non-payment of rent and more often because the landlord, who had let the flat for a family of two, visited us and found ten or twelve. But moving was not very expensive, only a little bothersome. The sole cost involved was the hiring of a pushcart. This my grandmother loaded herself with a chest of drawers, a half-dozen mattresses, an iron bedstead, a few stools, some kitchen utensils, and

with me perched on top of the load she would push her cart to the new abode and was ready to do business once more. If 127 Madison Street had grown too tony and swell to have a dozen people in two rooms, she would settle down at 11 Market Street, where they were glad to accommodate seventeen people in one room. The main thing was that I should have a congenial home and pleasant surroundings.

At first Grandma Esther, for my sake, settled with me at the home of her daughter-in-law, who then had only three children, Minnie, Annie, and Irwin. This she did to provide me with playmates. But I was at the time a rabid woman-hater—a prejudice I have since outgrown —and I decided to do away with all little girls of my own age or thereabouts, so that Minnie and Annie were found in a badly wounded and partially unconscious condition after a few friendly and playful encounters with me. But while I beat the little girls in true cave-man fashion, Irwin beat me, and this I resented at the top of my voice.

Still, the only systematic musical training I ever received dates from this time, and I originated it myself. I would take my aunt's modest supply of silver, and from the fifth floor, where we lived, I used to drop forks and spoons, one at a time, through the steep shaft of banisters, and by the clang I could tell on which floor the silver had landed. It required quite a little skill to send a knife clear down the five flights and detect by the sound that it had landed in the hall. Afterwards I tried this trick with plates. These cute ideas completely horrified my

poor aunt. She was afraid I would try to throw the dining-room furniture down next, so she put me to bed without food; but Grandma Esther, indignant that her darling little Eddie had not been properly appreciated, smuggled some cookies in to me and hid the leg of a chicken under my pillow. Kissing and soothing me, she decided then and there that we would live together and alone.

And so all day, while the good woman delivered Polish girls and their baggage at a dollar a head, I grew up on the sidewalks of New York, with an occasional fall into the gutter. Grandma Esther had failed to take scientific courses in mother-training, but in her simple, bungling way she did the best she knew. If I banged myself against a stone slab and came into the house with a lump bigger than my head, she pressed the cold steel of a carving-knife against the swelling, mumbled some strange incantations to drive off the evil spirit, and pretty soon the lump subsided. If I was laid up with fever she covered my face with a damp cloth, sprinkled some herbs and red pepper upon it, then uttered a prayer to my departed mother to intercede on my behalf with the powers of heaven, and immediately the heavenly wheels of influence were set in motion and I was saved.

Only the ignorant, according to my grandmother, depended on doctors. She considered it a sacrilege the way the woman on the top floor of 13 Market Street would constantly call the neighborhood doctor, with the result that her child was constantly ill. And the doctor,

Grandma Esther

Eddie at the Age of Six in His Holiday Clothes

Three Beau Brummels of the East Side—Jack, Murray, and Cousin Eddie

a stout asthmatic with a red face, would not even climb the four flights to look at his patient, but carried on his examination from the sidewalk, shouting up to the woman who leaned out of her window to answer him.

"What is it, Mrs. Lefkowitz?" cried the physician.

"Mine child, it hurts him his belly!" complained the worried Mrs. Lefkowitz.

"Give him castor-oil!" shouted up the physician. "And throw down a dollar!"

Grandma Esther looked on, her head nodding sadly. Here was a man walking from house to house, bellowing up medical advice to the women and getting money thrown at him from every window. And she felt she had cured more people with her mysterious herbs and incantations than all the doctors ever would. But one day her sacred magic failed.

I was an excited umpire on the side lines of a gang fight when a jagged, flying brick struck me, cleaving my forehead almost in two, and I fell unconscious on the curbstone in a pool of blood. My grandmother, wailing and distracted, tried with her prayers to revive me, but finally carried me into the nearest drug store. The druggist on the East Side was in those days a factotum of science. If you came in with a prescription from a professor, he usually frowned and asked in deep concern, "What is this for?" You told him it was for your stomach and he laughed pityingly. "Why, then he gave you the wrong thing. This medicine is only for tonsils. Besides, he gave you a dose that could kill a horse!" And

you wound up by taking the druggist's prescription instead. And if you came in for liver pills, the chances were you went out with a camera, a hot-water bag, a box of stationery, and a carpet-cleaner. This druggist in particular had acquired a wide reputation as a surgeon because he had once bandaged a badly cut leg. He always prided himself on the fact that the bandage never came off, though the leg did. Reassuring my grandmother that there was nothing to worry about, he put five stitches into my forehead, omitting the perfunctory routine of first washing out the wound, and then he made one of his perfect bandages. In two days my head was swollen to a size that no success in later life could swell it again.

My grandmother, now really frightened, carried me to the Essex Street dispensary where the wound was reopened and carefully treated. For three months she carried me in her arms each day to the Good Samaritan Dispensary, watched over me tenderly, soothing me through the nights of fever and pain, until at last the wound was healed and I could walk again. To this day that scar cuts across my brow and I sometimes wonder why I haven't invented a romantic story about it, to tell people that a hand wielding a saber suddenly appeared and slashed across my forehead to set a stamp of eternal sadness which the comedian always conceals beneath his mask of make-up. Now that I've made it up, maybe it's true at that.

As I grew older my grandmother left a standing order at the corner grocery that while she was away on business

I could choose my own meals from the menu of canned herrings, sardines, and the various barrels of olives and cheese. And after a light diet of kippered herring I would wander among the pushcarts for my dessert. I developed a knack for slipping bananas up my sleeve and dropping apples into my blouse while the peddler was busy filling some housewife's market bag. I used to pack a peach into my mouth with one snap of the jaws and look deeply offended when the peddler turned suspiciously upon me. With steady practice I got so that I could gulp a banana at one swallow and appear absolutely famished with a plum in each cheek.

One of my earliest achievements which I feel would have won me a place in history even if I had never met Ziegfeld, was that, between the ages of six and twelve, I became the world's supreme delicatessen eater, absorbing more salami, pastrami, bologna, and frankfurters in that short span than most families do in a lifetime. That's a fact. Even now as I daintily dip my zwieback into a cup of lukewarm milk I shudder as I think of my early prowess. I was the trusted emissary, or maybe ambassador, of the Isaac Gelles Wurst Works in those years, and carried their daily supply of pickled meats from the factory on Essex Street to their big store at 14 Market Street. I used to start out with an empty stomach and a full basket and wind up *vice-versa*.

I often watch my own children now, eating their careful diets of orange juice, gelatine puddings, coddled eggs and custards, nicely caloried and vitamined, and I can't

help wondering how any of the old East Side herring-tearers remained alive at all. Still, we had our own ideas of training then. We believed that if practice makes for progress, then a stomach trained on bologna can in later life digest nails, and a head banged often enough on pavement can later buck granite. I guess both methods are partly right. It's the age-old issue that will never be solved, between the coddled egg and the hard-boiled one.

At the age of six I began to keep late hours. At midnight, after my grandmother had retired, I would crawl onto the iron bedstead beside her, and if she happened to wake up and ask me where I had been, I appeared to be sound asleep and even gave a snore or two to convince her. But in reality I had been out with a band of boys two and three times my age who spent their nights in a revelry of song. For the East Side at night is not only menaced by the caterwauling of cats, but by gangs of youngsters who sit on the stoops and the corner stands, singing all the popular songs with all their might at an age when their voices are changing. In a choir like this my voice stood out to advantage.

While children of six usually sing all their songs on one and the same note and that note for some reason is usually flat, I managed to follow the tune pretty well and if a note was very high I made it, if I had to climb a pole to reach it. The other boys, in recognition of my ability, would let me sing a solo; but some unappreciative listener on the third floor once drowned out the concert with a pail of water, giving an impromptu black-out to my act.

But I wasn't discouraged by this icy reception. Only a jealous man, I thought, would pour water on a performing artist. And if my voice could arouse such envy, I must develop it at all costs. So I sang under the same window the next night and twice as loud.

I grew lean, big-eyed, eager, eating from grocery barrels, singing in back yards, playing in gutters and on the roofs of houses, and combining with it all the smatterings of a public-school education. I was not introspective—whatever that is. I simply took to life as a darky takes to rhythms, and vibrated with it. In short, I was a typical New York street boy who, by a peculiar and deft twist of fortune, eventually lands either in the Bowery Mission or in a bower of roses.

Chapter III

One day I learned about parents. They were mysterious people who bought wonderful things for other children, but never thought about me. Little Jonah Goldstein had a wagon and said his parents bought it. Young Ira Atkins paraded with a popgun and a wooden tomahawk. The street-corner club met and boasted of the rare gifts they would get for the holidays. One dark, stern little lad, Daniel Lipsky, not only received presents, but at the age of nine already carried a pad and pencil in his pocket to calculate his savings and set aside a small sum to buy tokens for others. He was born with an infallible instinct for figures and if the club planned a joint enterprise he quickly concluded, "Boys, this will cost a dollar twenty and we've got to chip in eight cents a piece." The moment one uttered a number Daniel would say, "Six per cent of that" and give you the answer. It was a kind of magic to me. And when Daniel marched down the block in a new birthday suit and revealed a fire-engine he had gotten for Channukah, I realized that parents must be marvelous things. I'd have to get myself a few.

"My father bought me this," remarked Lipsky, impressively. "That fire-engine must cost four-ninety-eight!" But I was not to be outdone.

"You call that an engine!" I sneered. "That's a peanut! Why, my father is a fireman! He rides the hook-and-ladder and everything!"

"You ain't got a father," retorted Benny Shulberg.

"I have so!" I insisted. "And any time I want I can go down to the fire house and ride the engine with him!" For a moment the other boys' features darkened and their lips drooped in envy.

"Say, fellers, is he really got a father?" asked Benny, waveringly. But I was determined. If every other lad had a father, I had one, too, and a real live father—a father who was a fireman one day, a cop the next day, and on another occasion the biggest chief the Indians ever had!

"Well, if you got one," snarled Jonah Goldstein, who had a wagon and a legal mind even at that early date, "then why don't we ever see him and where's the presents he brings you?"

This stumped me, but only for an instant.

"You think my father would hang out with you guys! But Danny seen him and he seen all the presents. Didn't you, Danny?"

This was too speculative a proposition for Danny to underwrite. He always believed in safe, conservative investments and I'll come to that when I explain the million dollars which ultimately appeared upon the scene, after Dan put the brakes on me and muzzled me with a budget. In the meantime he let me plunge into Father Preferred without margin.

"Aw, you're lying!" chorused the boys.

"I'm not!" I said, grimly. "I'll take you down to the fire house and you can meet him!" Tears had come to my eyes and the boys felt they had pressed me too hard. "Well, maybe you got one," said Ira. They knew I

was an orphan. But if I had been only a little taller I'd have impersonated my own father and shown those wiseacres!

Still, this same imaginative technique applied to my school lessons did not work. I could not picture the answer to a problem in arithmetic, and no matter how vividly I exerted my fancy, my dates in history were wrong. But I had to get promoted in some way and the way I could talk myself out of an answer established me as a star in rhetoric. At least, if I didn't answer correctly, I recited well, and teachers loaned me to one another to serve as general reciter in the assembly. As one of them observed, naïvely, "It doesn't matter what he says, but he says it beautifully." I never could learn the exports of South America, but when I recited, "Benedict Arnold—The Traitor's Deathbed" and "The Soul of the Violin" the assembly applauded and the geography teacher forgave me. I was the star at every graduation but my own. My own didn't materialize.

While Benedict Arnold pulled me through four terms, the "Address of Regulus to the Romans" dragged me through an additional three terms. And it looked as though Antony's oration over the body of Cæsar would sweep me through the last year and graduate me with honors. But a narrow-minded schoolmaster of the old birch-rod type insisted on treating me like one of the class and refused to promote me for a little thing like failing in all my subjects. I was young and impetuous, so I

struck the teacher on the jaw with a board-rubber and left the school while he was still being counted out.

The way I figured it at the time, the teacher was jealous because I could recite better than he could, just as the fellow with the pail of water had been jealous of my singing. That gave me confidence and I resolved, as summer approached, to do a real singing-and-reciting act at the boys' camp which I had been attending every season from the age of nine.

There had long been a movement on the East Side for fresh air. But the East Siders were not clear on the subject of air and could never quite distinguish it from food vapors. Each street had its own favorite flavor which it cherished with a certain local and civic pride. If, for instance, the tang of herring was missing from Hester Street, the Hester Streeters thought they were walking in a vacuum. Similarly, the Italian quarter had its air pockets filled with garlic; under Williamsburg Bridge blew strong fish breezes, and no rich supply of ozone was complete without the ingredients of a dozen stables and the thousand and one fumes arising from vegetable push-carts, poultry and meat markets, pickle works, and refuse cans. If one walked down Orchard Street toward Rivington, one knew definitely that here air was literally cheese, sometimes fragrant cream cheese blended with cottage, and sometimes it was stale Roquefort with a dash of Gorgonzola. Subtract the cheese from this region and people would die for lack of air.

Under such circumstances the uninitiated uptowners

who knew nothing about air and described it as a tasteless, odorless, colorless, meaningless substance that hovered about anywhere and nowhere, and could never be smelled, tasted, or even touched, were a crowd of visionary reformers who were trying to tamper with the fundamental laws of nature. Their insidious propaganda that windows should be opened and air allowed into homes was an obvious plot to destroy the home. For each little flat manufactured a thick, tasty atmosphere of its own like gravy, which must never be allowed to escape or mingle with the aromas of the street. And when I slipped into the two-room apartment to sleep in my grandmother's iron bed, with ten other roomers scattered on the floor, all problems of insomnia were instantly solved, for the atmosphere knocked me into slumber with one blow. I didn't sleep in those good old days; I lay unconscious. Nor would the fall of a building or a feeble fire alarm disturb me.

Fortunately, I had a faithful waker in the person of my school chum, the punctual Lipsky. This boy, to whom I was drawn by the sheer force of opposites, made it first a duty, then a passion to come every morning at seven-fifteen and begin the waking operation, which usually lasted three-quarters of an hour. It was as serious a process as waking a man out of ether.

The first step was to shake me gently with a kick that rolled me clear across the bed. This was a signal for me to yawn and turn over on the other side. Then Lipsky took a firm grip of my long, black hair like a handle and

pulled my head off the pillow, forcing me into a sitting posture, at which I opened one eye, said, "What the hell is the idea?" and promptly dropped my head back on the pillow. Lipsky pulled it up again and this exercise was repeated ten times.

Then the relentless Daniel rolled me back and forth, massaged and pummeled me like a rubber at the bath, bent me up like a jack-knife and pulled my legs and arms out of their sockets, folding and twisting me in all possible shapes and positions, until he was covered with perspiration, exhausted, and ready to fall asleep himself. It was the routine of this morning waking that years later gave me the idea for my osteopath scene in the Ziegfeld Follies. It went over so well that I've had a mauling scene in almost every show since, and I've been thumped, thwacked, and twisted into a cruller on the stage by masseurs, chiropractors, bonesetters and fight-trainers.

The first time I did this scene, Bert Williams, the great negro comedian, suggested that while we were not on the stage we should stand in the wings and count each other's laughs. He did a very funny monologue then, and when it was over I told him, "Bert, you got twenty-nine laughs." That was like telling a man his stock had doubled in a week. Then I went on for my osteopath scene, and when I came back-stage Bert shook his head.

"How many?" I asked.

"You got just one laugh," he said.

"What do you mean, one laugh?"

"Well, it lasted from the time you got on till the time you came off."

But in the days when I rehearsed that scene with Lipsky it was no laughing matter. I needed a pulmotor to bring me to. Yet no one suspected that it might be lack of air.

So a new experience awaited me the first summer that I and my faithful alarm clock, Dan, were dispatched to the country for two weeks' vacation by the Educational Alliance, the community welfare center on East Broadway. For one dollar and a half to cover the fare, the Alliance sent poor lads from the tenements to a delightful boys' camp at Surprise Lake, Cold Springs, New York. Grandma Esther, thankful to be rid of me for two weeks and have me out of harm's way, paid the fare, and I went for my virgin trip to the country. I was thrilled with the awesome prospect of meeting Nature face to face. But the first deep breath of country air made me hiccup and gave me chills.

Cold Springs was a strange place. There wasn't a horsecar or a delicatessen store in it. It didn't have a single tenement house or a back alley. It was not a network of brick walls covered with patches of sky like metal ceiling. It had no walls of any kind and it was all sky. Sky, sky, sky, as far as the eye could see. A rich, blue-silk sky with islands and castles and ships painted on it in silver and gold tinted silhouettes. And green stretches of grass rolled like plush carpets over wide, endless playgrounds.

My first breathless impression of wonder was mingled with anger. Why had the city folk held out on me and not told me of this "bunk" sooner? Why, this place had Seward Park and Pitt Street Park backed into a flower-pot! I hadn't seen so many trees in one place except on the wall paper in the Lipskys' front room. And Lake Surprise, brother, was a flabbergasting astonishment!

The nearest I had ever got to a lake was the fountain at Rutgers Square where the kids used to duck for pennies in hot August days. But here was a lake that was first cousin to an ocean. Besides, look at the color of the water! I didn't know that water one swam in could be transparent. Off the East River docks, where the boys went for a dip, there was always a blue film of oil from passing tugs, and a boy who didn't come out of the river looking dark brown hadn't bathed!

But if Surprise Lake was for bathing, they must have champagne springs for drinking. And they had! Pure champagne sparkling out of the natural rock. A strange, magic world I had stumbled into, with fruits growing on trees instead of pushcarts, soda water bubbling out of stones, air that was sharp and tasted like peppermint, and beautiful scenery like in the geography books.

I wandered out of the camp along the dirt roads banked with rich green and golden foliage, my eyes popping at all the flying, hopping, dancing fragments of beauty that darted in shining streaks out of bushes, over trees, into the sky. I wondered whether in this heavenly place there were cops and gangsters like in the city of smoke and

walls, or whether little boys put on white shirts and wings before they went to bed. I absent-mindedly picked up a nice round stone. Ah, if I had that in the city to throw at Epstein the tailor's window!

I passed a pretty row of freshly painted cottages. Each with shiny windows glittering in the sunset and dressed in gay, beribboned curtains like little picnic girls. How could I resist throwing that stone and watch the angry faces appear and chase me down the road? I knew those calamity cries: "You loafer! You bummer! You wouldn't never come on this block again!" It would feel like home to be cursed and maltreated in this strange, almost inhuman paradise. I threw it! There was a loud, sharp crash of splintered, screaming glass, and then there was silence. No angry face appeared. Only the hole like a gash in some live, breathing form gaped at me and I ran frightened back to the camp.

Here amid the clatter of evening dishes I joined the group from my own district, shouting and laughing, eating my fill of fresh, wholesome food, fondly hoping that this life would last forever. That night, chilled with all the health and vigor that had suddenly broken through my skinny, underfed body, I went in advance of the others to the sleeping tents, and knowing I would be cold through the night, I glanced casually about to see that no one was watching and appropriated two blankets from the cots of other boys and wrapped them around my own. I knew I would be punished for this theft and as I lay warmed by three blankets I expected the camp cop to

come after me and poke me with a club. But nothing happened and I was allowed to sleep comfortably on.

The next day the camp director, Morris Berk, smiled genially at me and I smiled back, happy that all was well.

"Come here, my boy," said the director, kindly. I approached in anticipation of something pleasant and Morris Berk patted my cheek in a fatherly fashion. "You're a nice lad, Eddie, and I know you feel chilly at night and like to keep warm, but when you steal two blankets from the other cots that means that two other little boys lie all night without blankets and feel very cold. Now, is that right?"

I felt hot waves of embarrassment mount to my face. I had never been reprimanded quite so gently and no one had ever appealed to my innate sense of justice. Instead of a scowl I got a smile; instead of a blow, a pat on the cheek. Yes, life was totally different in this marvelous boys' heaven. I would never throw a stone at a window again. I would never do wrong. This was a great turning-point in my life. The next night I stole only one blanket.

Chapter IV

LIFE at Surprise Lake Camp was a glorious dream to the scrawny, underfed lads of the Ghetto, but after two weeks they were parceled back to the dungeon streets and towering caves, while new boys with yellow faces and blue lips arrived. My problem was how to stay on permanently in this miraculous land where the parks never ended and the city streets never began. Every Saturday night there was a roaring camp fire and the hardy backwoodsmen from Orchard and Hester Streets gathered around the crackling logs, told blood-curdling tales, and burned marshmallows on match-sticks.

Here I used my ingenuity. "The Traitor's Deathbed" and "The Soul of the Violin" had all but pulled me through school. Perhaps they would prolong my stay at Cold Springs. Anyway, it was worth trying, and I recited them as I never did before, determined to wring their hearts and make them put out the fire with their tears. I made such terrifying grimaces, rolled and bulged my eyes, and wrinkled my face so fiercely that my youthful audience involuntarily made faces after me; but the older fellows and directors thought my violent dramatic effort was a corking good parody and they broke into gales of laughter. The younger boys joined them, and very much to my dismay I was hailed as a great comedian. Of course, I agreed that I had intended the recitations as a parody, but I wondered to myself, "Could I make them laugh if I wanted to?"

His Father, Michael Cantor, Who Died When Eddie Was Two

Eddie and Ida at Coney Island, 1909

Eddie Cantor, 1908, in His First Made-to-order Suit for Stage and Street Wear

The boys clamored for an encore and cried, "Let it be as funny as the last one!"

I gave impersonations of the Polish servant girls whom my grandmother placed on jobs. I had often done this at home to amuse the girls themselves, and at least they thought it was funny, so I took a chance. I burst into a protest in Polish gibberish that had no meaning at all, and it went over. I've found that comedy that has no message is always delivered. Then, with a kerchief wrapped around my head like a shawl, and a shrill voice, I posed as a grand and haughty servant girl interviewing and cross-examining her miserable mistress. I got what I was after. I was kept over for an extra week as an amusement feature of the camp.

I became well known among the boys and was called "Happy" because I tied a little can to my head and looked like Hooligan. One summer I managed to stay on for seven weeks. But it was not always easy to get the initial fare to Surprise Lake. Lipsky, who was methodical and thrifty, would be all set with his fare for the summer by the previous November, while I never had anything but the desire. My grandmother, to teach me thrift, refused to pay my fare unless I earned it, so a few weeks before vacation I suddenly became industrious, and offered to collect her oustanding accounts for candles and safety-pins, a side line she maintained along with her agency.

"And where is the money from Mrs. Pincus?" she inquired as I failed to turn over the collection.

"She'll pay next week," I said, carelessly.

"And what's about Mrs. Gartel and Mrs. Finkel and Mrs. Bendelbloom?"

"Everybody next week!"

And next week when she asked, "Well, what's about Mrs. Pincus and Mrs. Gartel and the rest of them?" I became impatient. "Don't you remember they all paid you last week, grandma?"

Grandma said nothing, but as I was preparing to leave the house triumphantly she called after me, "Now remember, use that money for fare! And next time, don't think you're so smart!"

I felt rather awkward, but I was happy, for I had to get to Surprise Camp by whatever road I could take.

At the camp the directors would eat their meals after the boys were served, and though I usually avoided work, I vied for the privilege to wait upon them. I became a surprisingly efficient and diligent waiter, and in my industrious, preoccupied manner I always managed to take away their desserts before they were half finished, and the directors, ashamed to grapple with me to retain their dishes, let them go, and I finished the desserts myself.

Still, while I probably ate more desserts than all the directors combined, I often came late for meals, and after the last bell sounded, the iron rule of the camp forbade food to the delinquents. At times like these I put on my most famished expression and went guiltily to the back door of the kitchen, where the beaming Mrs. Bloomer, a buxom, benevolent matron, would never let me go hungry. She took such a motherly delight in conspiring with the

late comers that it was a wonder anybody ever came on time. To this day—it is twenty-five years since—camp alumni still come at any hour and find a hearty welcome at her table.

When I was ten, twenty-nine boys and myself formed a camp club at Cold Springs which still exists. In these twenty-five years not a member has been added and not a member has been lost. We solemnly resolved at that time to give to other half-starved city boys the same pleasure we had shared, and though we have grown to manhood, drifted into various pursuits, some married, others still eligible, all are active members of the camp club and contribute to its work. We continue to meet in a different member's home each month, planning improvements and extensions for the camp. And Daniel Lipsky, the first president of the club, is the president to this day.

Recently, by the action of its directors, the name of Surprise Lake Camp was changed to The Eddie Cantor Camp but greatly as I prized this honor, I asked them to retain the original name for the sake of its memories and associations. For along with my work on the stage the pleasure of helping city-saddened boys to health and recreation has absorbed the best impulses I have had in life. The Eddie Cantor Camp Committee of which our early club formed the nucleus, has through the years with its own funds, transformed the old tents to modern bungalows, of which we now have one hundred. From a summer resort we turned Cold Springs into an all-year home for boys, and the sicklier ones were toned up

in the winter. In the neediest cases we have even eliminated the charge for fare—because I know what it meant for me to raise that dollar and a half—and we have often prolonged the vacation for some from two weeks to a month. Our camp takes a boy from the door of his home and brings him back there, giving him all the comforts of nature, science, affection, and good food without taking a penny from him.

It seems a matter of fate that I, who am the father of five girls, should have a whole campful of boys on the side. But that's not why I did it. I am really devoted to the boys, without any ulterior motive. Every year I arrange one affair for the camp with an all-star bill that makes Ziegfeld and Dillingham wish they had a camp for every day in the year to be able to line up such an array of talent on a single stage. Two years ago while I was in Hollywood making a picture I had an attack of pleurisy, but in spite of it I made the trip to New York to attend the camp benefit, and returned the next day.

Once my overzealous affection was misunderstood by the boys of the camp. I visited Surprise Lake and wanted to entertain the boys as I had done twenty years before around the camp fire. A couple of camp instructors with megaphones went out on the ball fields and playgrounds announcing, "Eddie Cantor will sing a few songs for you. Everybody come to the auditorium!" I was sitting under a tree, waiting for my public to be corralled, when a group of red-faced lads hot from a ball game passed by, dragging their bats and gloves with glum, sullen faces. One

of them grumbled, "Aw, Gee! We come out here to have some fun and now we got to go in and listen to this guy, Eddie Cantor!"

But I'm far ahead of my story. It was a long time before I, a skinny, hollow-chested son of the slums, could lend a hand to a new generation of starvelings. Nice and simple as it looks on the whole, it was complicated in its details, and during the vague, formative years I vacillated, drifted between impulses to act and amuse and a desire to slouch around street corners, hang out in poolrooms, join guerilla gangs, and became a gangster's tool. Who could tell, by looking at a group of East Side youngsters, which would become a Gyp the Blood or Lefty Louie and which a Marcus Loew or Irving Berlin?

What would become of me I knew least of all. For this is a fact. All those grappling, struggling little lives that swarm upon the sidewalks of New York and overflow its housetops and its gutters like the millions of crawling, flying, creeping creatures of the forest, are all endowed with a similar mixture of spirit, vitality, ambition, and cunning; each gifted with an abundance of wild energy like the thousand streams that feed a waterfall, and it is hard to say which of these forces will assert itself—which shall aspire to the lion's throne, which acorn shall rise to the prowess of an oak, which flying egg shall hatch to be an eagle, and which sorry blend of life essence shall be the worm.

Thrown indiscriminately into the maze and tangle of

skyscrapers and lowly tenements, like seeds cast over rocks and fields and seas, these countless thousands rise and grow and pass through what is broadly the same school for all. Poverty clamps them down to narrow limits, desire urges them on to new ambitions, necessity whets their natural cunning and teaches some to steal, others to lie, and encourages all to deception; then sad experience makes them kind and tolerant; those who are weak, adversity makes weaker; those who are strong, success makes stronger; and in the last selection and arrangement of their lives, those who were at first together are now far apart and some have traveled up the river to the chair and others traveled up the ladder to the throne.

At twelve I sizzled with purposeless energy. If it could have been properly chained, and Ford had retracted sooner, he might have hitched me to his factory and saved a power-plant. But it was allowed to run wild and my energy took on every shape except work. As a boy of thirteen I felt my first urge to power. I pulled a cap down over my eyes, donned a big red sweater and flourished a bat, looking for all the world like the chief of a gas-house gang, when in reality I was flat-chested, underweight, frightened at my own bluff, and ready to be blown over by a breath. Still, when Pock-faced Sam, chief terror of the local strikers, had to hire guerillas to guard the strike-breakers, he was so impressed by my formidable appearance that he engaged me as one of his strong-arm men. I pushed my cap down lower so they couldn't see how my teeth chattered and swung my bat, nearly falling

over with the effort, and pulled down three bucks a day for the pose. I didn't realize then that it was the actor in me that earned me my pay.

I was all for the rough life, spat sideways, and carried a gun for a regular gangster, but if the gun had ever gone off I'd have gone with it. In a gang fight I did all the acting and made enough facial contortions to scare away all the opponents my pals couldn't lick. Being the skinniest and most agile of the younger boys, I was employed to crawl through narrow bars and fanlights to open doors and secret passages for the marauders.

One of the gang's prize loots was a bicycle shop. I was lifted on a big chap's shoulders and slid in through the transom over the door. After I unlocked the door, the whole gang mounted bicycles and rode them to 110th Street near Central Park, where the leader assembled the booty and made sure that none of his loyal crew had cheated him. The other youngsters and I were rewarded with a cup of coffee and two doughnuts apiece, and we got a nickel each for car fare home. The distracted storekeeper knew who had committed the theft, but dared not squeal, and the next day the leader came down to see him and sold him back his own stock of bicycles.

It was high adventure. But what displeased me about these otherwise thrilling experiences was that they were too secret and confidential. If I was going to crawl through a transom or climb a drain pipe, why not first call a crowd together and at least get applause for it? My instinct for the footlight must have been greater than for

the searchlight. I longed for an audience. Regardless of what I did, I wanted to do it before the multitude, and so in my fourteenth year I turned to politics as the natural outlet for my talents. I had noticed that politicians, even when they had nothing to say, had listeners.

Those were busy years for me. I was too occupied a man now to take vacations or even think of the little strip of woodland at Surprise Lake. I threw myself enthusiastically into the midst of the political conflict. I didn't know at first that I had to belong to a party or fight for issues. I fought and argued purely for the fun of the fight and the sound and fury of the argument.

I got on a soap box and attacked the first candidate whose poster I noticed in a butcher shop. It happened to be Morris Hillquit, a Socialist. I told my audience in strict confidence that Socialists were bomb-throwers and that Hillquit ate ham, even though his picture was in a kosher butcher shop. I worked havoc on the unfortunate candidate and some of my more susceptible listeners made a definite resolve to go out and commit murder. It thrilled me to find that I could influence the moods and emotions of people. "I've got them going," I thought. "Now let's see if I can get them going the other way."

The next night I spoke in praise of the man I had attacked. I championed Hillquit's cause and hailed him as a leader of the working class. I ripped off my own shirt in tattered strips to show the blood stains on my back from the lash of my brutal boss in the sweatshop. "Down with the capitalists," I cried, "and up with Hill-

quit!" I had never been in a sweatshop, but I knew how to slap on red paint, and the act went over big.

But the next time out I stumped for Hillquit's opponent. I held my audience so spellbound that pickpockets found easy pickings among the engrossed listeners, and whenever I paused for effect or for breath they would urge me to talk on. "Go on, kid! It's great stuff!" they pleaded, and I went on more and more excitedly while they frisked the crowd. I was doing fine and so were they.

Once in a while a charitable pickpocket would interrupt me in the middle of my speech and say: "All right, kid, you can go home now! We got enough!" It was not till later that I learned what an invaluable asset I had been to the pickpocket industry.

My passion for talking was a labor of love and while other distinguished orators of my day belonged to the Spellbinders' Club and got two dollars a night and spoke for only one candidate, I got nothing at all and spoke for and against everybody.

It was only when I attacked a Democrat whom I had praised the night before, that some self-appointed representatives of the party knocked the soap box from under me, dispersed my audience with a few well-aimed beer bottles, and gave me such a beating that I solemnly swore that if I cared to have a future as a public speaker and remain alive, I would henceforth be a loyal Democrat. That is how I was enrolled in the party.

One of my first assignments was to speak for a young

Assemblyman running at the time, known as Alfred E. Smith. I decided to make a great speech because this was the first candidate I really knew personally. For young Mr. Al was a popular and lovable figure on the East Side. When I lived on Henry Street, Alfred Smith lived on Oliver Street, two blocks away. From the pool-room around the corner where the other boys and I spent edifying hours, Mr. Smith would call the whole crowd over to Bassler's saloon and blow to drinks. But Al always picked the youngsters out of the crowd, separating them from the rest, and he would order nothing but sarsaparilla for the kids and schooners for the young men.

He would lead us in song, protect the weaklings from the bullies, and add that bit of kindliness and sunshine to the dingy gloom of our lives which would be reflected on our faces for many days. We idolized young Mr. Al, and all the boys stood loyally by him like a recognized and unanimously appointed guardian of our destinies.

When tough, heavy-set men of the alleys, with big, square jaws and shifty eyes, would throw a rock at an old peddler merely because he had a beard, Al Smith would come to the old man's aid and put his arm around him like a brother. It was the downright, simple heroics of the thing that struck the slum boys with wonder, and I can never forget the picture of this young and handsome Mr. Al coming among the ragged, hairy, bearded people of the abyss, extending a hand of welcome and friendship to all of them, as if the lady of the Statue of Liberty had sent her own son to receive these poor,

bewildered immigrants on her behalf. So when I took the stump, my first words were, "This man who is running for Assembly now will some day sit in the White House, and the present Assemblyman is the future President, Alfred E. Smith!"

After words like these I felt I had suddenly become a man, and I secretly resolved that the next time Al Smith invited the boys to Bassler's saloon I would refuse the sarsaparilla and insist on the schooner. Al Smith, however, told me, "Kid, you may be old enough to prophesy, but you're too young to drink beer."

Last year, while playing in the Ziegfeld Follies, the doorman came to my dressing-room and said there was a Mr. Smith downstairs who wanted to see me. I was busy making up for the opening scene and hadn't the time to be disturbed. "It's one of those song-pluggers," I told the doorman. "I guess he wants to sing me one of his new songs. Tell him to come back after the show." As the doorman turned to go, the door opened and Mr. Smith appeared.

"Say, what's the idea telling me to come back after the show?" asked Mr. Smith. And he got down on one knee and began to wave his hands in a mammy posture *à la* Jolson. "I've got a great song and I'm going to sell it to you right now!"

"Why, Governor!" I exclaimed, running to meet him. "Why didn't you say it was you!"

"I did."

"But you didn't say 'The Governor'!"

"I left him in Albany."

Outside of his official capacity he was plain "Mr. Smith." A marvelously human fellow, modest, unassuming. A really great man. Always taken up with his duties, he rarely goes to amusements and he probably sees no more than ten or twelve shows a year, but he makes a holiday of them like a child. Generally when some prominent official or personage is in the theater, the management has been notified in advance and most often the tickets are complimentary. Alfred E. Smith always buys his own tickets and you never know when he's there. He simply sends out a man to any agency to get the best he can for the money, and the man never says, "The tickets are for the Governor."

It was a great thrill to me when I made my bow on Broadway to have the young Mr. Al from Oliver Street applaud my efforts from the Governor's chair.

But when I first stumped for him on soap boxes in the open air, while it made me happy, it also made me hoarse. Grandma Esther nursed me and poured me full of raw eggs and milk. She was puzzled at my sudden tonsilar activities.

"How much do you get for making all these speeches?" she inquired.

"Nothing," I rasped.

"Then what are you doing it for?"

"For pleasure!"

"Pooh! Maybe it's a pleasure to the public, but it's a pain in the neck to you!" she observed, unconsciously

coining a gag, and she hinted to me that a less talkative job might yield more silent but solid returns. I was still one of those simple children of art who thought that to get paid for work was a sin. Besides, I felt there was only one kind of work in the world—play; and to get paid for playing was a new idea. I suspected it wouldn't last long, and it didn't.

I got a job with an insurance company at 100 William Street, handling the postage of their correspondence department. In the two brief weeks that I handled this postage the company's correspondence increased, but nobody knew why. The officials of the firm, judging by the reams of stamps consumed, began to wonder who was writing to every person in the country and a few in Europe. They had their suspicions and decided on an experiment. They were curious to see, if I left the firm, whether the stamps would stick. So I was asked to leave, the stamps stuck, and the experiment was a success.

This left me without a job and it took me two years to decide that I wanted another one. I returned to the old block, a happy-go-lucky free lance, the envy and the ideal of all those boys who had to work. As I stood with my hands in my pockets at the corner stand I could contemplate life with a broad philosophy. I had been a politician, an entertainer at the camp, a member of the local gangs, a strong-arm man in labor agitations, an assistant to my grandmother in placing domestics; I had even socked a teacher and lost a job, and now, with this huge background of life, I felt ready at the age of thirteen to retire and

spend my remaining days in leisure, comfort, and advice to the young.

Like my father, I had developed a hobby. I liked to make funny faces at passers-by. At first they started and then they laughed. This encouraged me and I played such pranks that people would gather about me in the street and wonder when I would pass the hat around. Some of them asked, "Poor boy, whose is he?" They didn't know I was having a good time and trying my hardest to be funny. They only shook their heads and made stormy-weather forecasts about me. But occasionally somebody would say there was hope and that I'd turn out all right. In fact, I had a secret admirer who built symbols around me and thought I was Puck himself. But I found out afterward that she had designs on me.

One of the domestics lodging with my grandmother was a young Russian girl with large, black, sad eyes that reflected all the gloom and sorrow of her oppressed people. In her native town nobody had ever laughed, except the Cossacks. She had learned to associate laughter with bloodshed. So to her my comedy was not a joke, but, as she said, "It was a new world, a revelation." I should have become suspicious right then and there, but I didn't. I asked her to tell me more. I liked it.

She said, "I long to be always in the presence of your warm, pure humor. It's a new kind of sunlight."

She became jealous when I made the other girls laugh. She tried to save me and my jokes all for herself. It was the first time anybody had made a fuss over me and I fell

headlong, like down a flight of stairs. But when she finally managed to be alone in the house with me and gave me those earnest, longing glances, I began to feel uneasy. Being a Russian, she took even comedy seriously.

Fanya was only sixteen but she acted like much older. She urged me to sit beside her and hold hands, but I pleaded with her to let me go because the boys were waiting for me. It was my first rehearsal in life of a scene I have since used on the stage in many diverse forms—the seduction of the bashful boy by the bold, bad lady. It was always funny, except this time. I was hardly fourteen and had my code of honor to defend. For I knew that if the fellers on the block found out that I had held a girl's hand, I'd be branded as a "sissy" for life. But Fanya was very serious about her little comedian and I got scared.

"The boys are calling me," I pleaded, weakly. "Let go my hand! Listen, I'll tell you a joke if you let me go! P-l-e-a-s-e!" I cried, horrified, as she put her arm around my waist. "Listen! What's the idea?" I bawled as she dragged me to her in real apache style. And then she kissed me. "Oh, my God!" I groaned as if lightning had hit me. But she mangled me in an embrace and I couldn't even breathe. These Russians are certainly a serious people.

But Grandma Esther had a habit of coming into my life at crucial moments. "Fanya!" she commanded, sternly, appearing in the doorway. "Put the child back in his cradle!"

This made me rise to the dignity of the situation.

"Cradle!" My grandmother had wounded me deeply. "I'm a man!" I cried, and was tempted to stand up on a chair to prove it.

"Leave my house!" exclaimed Grandma Esther to Fanya, and Fanya turned her large, appealing eyes to me, the man in short pants and bicycle stockings.

"If she goes, I go with her!" I cried, completely losing my sense of humor.

"Keep quiet, before I spank you!" warned the old woman. I backed away, but Fanya flung her arms about me.

"My hero!" she murmured, adoringly.

Grandma Esther, until now angry and menacing, at the sight of this spectacle could restrain herself no longer, and burst into laughter.

"What's so funny about it?" I inquired, beginning to perspire.

"Why don't she get a feller her size?" taunted grandma, amused but still angry.

I treated this slur with the silent contempt it deserved. I took Fanya by the arm and we marched out of the house.

"Stop! You—you—you baseball-player you!" scolded grandma, hurrying after us into the hall. That was the worst name she could call me. To the pious people of the Ghetto a baseball-player was the king of loafers. I wavered, looked back, and tried to release my hand from Fanya's arm, but she held it as in a vise; and though I led her out she led me on.

EDDIE AS THE SINGING BUTLER IN GUS EDWARDS' "KID KABARET," 1913

Georgie Jessel and Eddie Cantor, 1912, Traveling with "Kid Kabaret"

Eddie Cantor and Bert Williams, Who Were Sonny and Papsy on the Stage and Off, 1917

"I'll follow you to the end of the world!" she cried pulling me down the stairs.

Grandma Esther, despite her wrath, could not imagine how such a ridiculous situation could develop into anything serious.

"Pooh!" she sneered, shouting after us. "Look what's eloping! If he gets tired, Fanya, carry him! And remember, Eddie, be back for supper! Tonight I got meat-balls!"

She knew that not even love could interfere with my love for meat-balls.

Chapter V

It was more than twenty-two years ago, when I was fourteen, that Fanya and I left my grandmother's house and I failed to return for the meat-balls. I was blissfully ignorant of all economic and domestic matters, but Fanya, who seemed to have had some previous training, rented the back room of a flat for eight dollars a month and arranged for my meals with the woman of the house. She explained to this woman that I was her frail young brother just out of the hospital, and told her to feed me cookies with cocoa and other nourishment good for growing children. Fanya departed. I ate heartily and made plans for a new life of independence and leisure when my grandmother, who had soon located the place, came to box my ears and take the infant Casanova home. But I had apparently caught the tang of adventure and refused to be rescued from captivity.

"Shame on you!" Grandma Esther chided. "What'll become of you? Wait! At home I'll give you already!" But even in the midst of her anger she could not resist the question, "Does she give you at least good food to eat?" But after her alternate warnings and wheedlings failed to budge me, she suddenly decided that I had been bewitched and her manner became sad and resigned.

"I was going to scold you," she said, and tears started to her eyes, "but maybe it has to be like this. It's a saying, 'The angels look after all children, but God Himself watches over the orphans.' For my part, Eddie, you

can do what you like, but remember, I hoped some day you'd become a big man and I should live to be proud from you!" The good woman kissed me as if she never expected to see me again. She sobbed and departed as if mourning after the dead. I had a hollow feeling in my heart. I was sorry my grandmother hadn't dragged me along by the scruff of the neck.

Impulsively I made the decision to change my whole mode of living. I would write Fanya a letter and leave before she returned. But I didn't know how to begin and I couldn't find a pencil. Besides, I thought it would be better to break the news to her myself. I would tell her that my grandmother and I had definitely decided that I was to become a big man and she would have to forget me. But by the time she returned I decided not to tell her just yet and things drifted on as before.

In the meantime, my old friend Lipsky, whom I hadn't seen for a long while, was devoting himself to courting my cousin Anne while escorting her to school, and he learned through her of the catastrophe that had befallen me. With characteristic thoroughness he suggested that a detective be hired to investigate and track down this mysterious girl who had kidnapped me. My grandmother backed the idea, and one day Dan arrived triumphantly on the heels of a sleuth, to get me out of her clutches. But now that the experience was getting so exciting, I was more than ever determined to stick. It was destined, however, that a few months later I should find my own

way out of this peculiar situation in a most unexpected and surprising manner.

It happened like this. Living the life of a man of means with a strange Lady Beautiful caring for me, I cherished the secret idea that I was one of the four hundred. While I belonged to no golf club or social set, I managed to perfect my game of pool and attended the summer-school recreation grounds of P. S. No. 1 and P. S. No. 177. Here I hobnobbed with the *élite* of Market and Oliver Streets, jumped the buck, played basket-ball, and engaged in all other activities befitting a man of my station. Though I could beat most of the boys at feats of sports, I found, to my embarrassment, that there were athletic girls who far outshone me.

One girl in particular won every prize for sports and dancing as fast as it could be unpacked and offered. She had become the main attraction of the recreation center and every youngster who could comb his hair neatly and wear a necktie proposed to her. Ida Tobias was the belle of Henry Street. Despite her athletic prowess she possessed a soft, girlish grace; a frank, bright countenance mellowed by two caressing eyes; but a sensible, aloof air inspired by her mother, who from an early age had warned her against all the potential good-for-nothings of the East Side who could make wonderful love but a very poor living.

I, the secret conqueror of a Russian housemaid, felt that all women must wither and succumb beneath my bulging, dominating glance. But Ida, queen of the summer school,

didn't seem to notice that I was alive. She was too much sought after to seek, too busy making conquests to surrender. For me to try and win her by competing with her in high jump, broad jump, vaulting, ladder-climbing, or tango would have meant defeat and disgrace. There was only one chance for me to emerge from increasing obscurity and decline—the chance I had played at Surprise Lake Camp, the chance I had played with the little servant audience in Grandma Esther's agency, the chance to entertain and amuse.

There was a cheap brass band in the playground which the recreation director, Mrs. Ray Schwartz, had introduced to lend a note of harmony to the wild discord of the center. I must confess that I was her all-star nuisance at the time, and I instigated most of the wild discord by pulling girls' braids, breaking up their dances, and running rough-shod through the games. But I made some retribution for this conduct twenty years later when I met Mrs. Schwartz in Paris and the little boy she ran out of school ran her down to Deauville. She had since established a magnificent girls' camp and I was glad to send my two daughters, Marjorie and Natalie, to spend a summer with her under entirely different circumstances from those in which their old man had spent his summers.

But at P. S. No. 177, Mrs. Schwartz tried her best to get on the right side of this rascal, and she discovered that all that was ailing me was a desire to sing at the playground concert, accompanied by the band. I was

given the chance and rendered the big hit of the moment, "My Mariuch she took-a de steamboat!" The song was not directed to the large and rather skeptical assembly of youngsters, but to her, the dainty little queen of sports who won all the silver-plated loving cups and athletic medals and didn't know till now that I was alive. Now she knew. But even more than the applause of the hard-boiled youngsters, I longed to hear the voice of her approval. I guess no performance in my life before or since had quite the significance of this one; for Ida Tobias, the belle of Henry Street, who for me was to be the belle of the world, came over and congratulated me.

It was a triumph. The next night I sang again and she allowed me to escort her home. With a victorious leer that swamped the other boys in one flood of humility, I marched out with the lovely Ida on my arm. But a block away from her house she stopped me. "You mustn't walk me up to my stoop," she said. "My parents must never see me with you. . . . You have a bad reputation around Henry Street," she added, bluntly. The news cut me like a saber.

Can she know about Fanya, I wondered? I've made a mess of everything, I thought. That night I spent in restless resolves and nightmares of shame. How could I expect Ida, whom all the boys of the neighborhood worshiped, to single me out for her favor in the light of such a reputation? Yes, everything would have to be different from now on. The old Eddie of the gangs and back-room flats must pass away and a new Eddie be born. The

next time I saw her I was greatly encouraged, for she smiled and even seemed amused at my poor attempts to be funny. "I guess she doesn't know, after all."

We were sitting alone on the steps of the school with the moon slyly peeping over the tenements, and I felt that the big moment had arrived. I fidgeted nervously and finally blurted out, "You are the only girl of all the girls of the school who are the girl that I love, if you don't mind." There was an awkward pause during which I tried to swallow my Adam's apple; then Ida looked sadly at me.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but my mother expects me to marry some one with a good, reliable position. A man who is somebody, if *you* don't mind." And Ida proceeded to tell me of two handsome young twins, Louis and Leo, who courted her and her sister Minnie, methodically, assiduously, relentlessly. They wore high white collars, brought boxes of candy every Saturday night, took out Ida and Minnie with their mother's permission, and they had steady, permanent positions as Post Office clerks which they could never lose. In fact, they still have them.

My head drooped and brow puckered. Could I get a job in the Post Office? This was the second time stamps had come into my life and stuck me. "What future is there in that?" I argued, pretending to be scornful. "Even after you learn the trade, you can't open your own post office!"

"But you haven't any future at all," reminded Ida, as tenderly as she could. "People say the worst things about

you. Some of my friends told me you tied yourself to a lamp-post by your necktie, stuck out your tongue and made believe you were dying!"

"Oh, that was just for a laugh," I said, trying to be modest. "And I fooled them, too. They really thought I was hanging!"

Ida looked at me severely. "And they told me you started to cry and howl at a street corner, saying your stepmother would kill you because you lost a quarter she gave you to buy bread, and the people chipped in pennies and nickels and told you not to cry! Will you do that after you're married, too?"

"Aw, a little stunt like that!" I mumbled, beginning to feel embarrassed.

"A stunt? Why, even the cops laugh at you!" Ida was on the verge of tears. To think that the cops didn't take me seriously enough to arrest me at least.

"Anyway, they know good comedy when they see it," I protested, coming to the defense of the force.

"Well, I'm not going to marry a man," said the thirteen-year-old belle with determination, "who hangs himself on lamp-posts and cries on street corners to make cops laugh!"

"I don't blame you!" I thought, helplessly. Today I might explain these youthful impulses as the urge within me to be myself—but who was I? Judging from Ida's glances at the time, I'd rather not answer the question. I had a feeling it was all over between us, but it wasn't. She continued to meet me often after that. Perhaps she

pitied me. In her eyes this funny, gawky fellow who'd stop at nothing for a laugh, was, after all, a skinny, lonely orphan, ill-fed and neglected. That seemed to have an irresistible appeal to the mother instinct of some girls and I felt inclined to reverse my dear grandmother's saying, for it seemed that God watched over all children, but a special troupe of angels looked after me.

On Sundays, when all the girls of the block went out with their beaus to parties, picnics, and Coney Island, Ida would turn down the invitation of Louis Rosner and spend the long, lonely holiday sitting on the school steps with me. "Look at all the fun you're missing," I'd tell her. "You could be riding the Chute the Chutes and Virginia Reel!" But she smiled kindly. "I enjoy listening to you better than a combination ticket to Luna Park!" And that was long, long before I had signed a contract with the Shuberts.

Then she would open the box of candy which Louis had faithfully delivered the night before, and we ate the candy, glancing stealthily about as if we were doing something terribly wicked but enjoyable. When there were no more candies left I got pangs of conscience and decided to earn lots of money so that Ida wouldn't have to accept gifts from somebody else. In the meantime I hadn't a cent, and I often discovered, on leaving her, that she had slipped a quarter into my pocket. It was humiliating to realize how well she knew me. I resented her considerateness, but I appreciated the quarter.

Ida not only sacrificed the pleasures of Sunday. She

soon lost the peace of the other six days. Stormy, quarrelsome times brewed in the Tobias home, streaked with paternal threats and drenched with her tears. For Hattie Immerman, a girl from the block, confided to me that Ida had definitely broken off with Louis Rosner. There had been a terrible scene at the house, and Ida's father had sworn to shut the door on his daughter. But Hattie assured me that even through her sobs Ida had insisted, "I'll marry no one if I don't marry Eddie Cantor!" Yet when I saw Ida she betrayed none of this, sitting as usual on the school steps, encouraging and enjoying my efforts at nonsense.

The time was ripe to break off with Fanya, but I didn't know how. The dingy little room on Cherry Street had grown oppressive and haunting. After all, who was this girl who had taken me out of my grandmother's house and undoubtedly thought that she owned me? Perhaps all that Lipsky had suspected was correct? I would have to assert my rights and reclaim myself. But she seemed so kind and particularly gracious that day. Maybe I ought to wait for a better occasion, I thought.

She told me in her sweetest manner that she had gotten a raise in her pay and gave me four dollars to buy two tickets for a holiday matinée of "The Talk of New York" at the Grand Opera House on Twenty-third Street and Eighth Avenue. It would be the first real play I had ever seen and she wanted me to get the best two seats. I did. But then something strange happened.

I waited for Ida that night to come home from work.

She looked tired and wan, but tried to smile, and I felt a sudden deep compassion for her. She had sacrificed so much pleasure for me. I owed her an outing in return. But I had never had the money to give her a real treat. Now I had two of the best seats for "The Talk of New York," by George M. Cohan, starring Victor Moore.

"Would you like to see a matinée tomorrow?" I asked, casually.

Ida was thrilled but careful.

"Where did you get the money?"

"Oh, I'm coming up in the world," I remarked, with a nonchalant wave of the hand.

"It's wonderful!" Her faith in me had been vindicated.

That night I explained to Fanya that I had lost the four dollars. "Then we can't go," she said, very logically.

I could hardly sleep in anticipation of the next day's glory. I brushed my faded clothes meticulously and hurried eagerly to meet Ida. She let me come right to the doorstep and take her. A young man who could spend four dollars on two seats made a mere supplier of candy pale into the shadows. We reached the theater.

But I did not suspect that the gloomy-eyed Fanya was waiting in front of the Grand Opera House to give me a royal reception. She had probably wondered of late at my air of estrangement and suspected that a strange force was drawing me from her. Now at last she was face to face with my iniquity. She unsheathed a huge hat-pin from

her bonnet and with a fierce cry pursued her deceiver down the avenue from Twenty-third to Twenty-first Street. The chase, the scandal, and the screams of startled passers-by were certainly the talk of New York.

One thing, however, the incident closed—the double life was exposed and died of exposure. Fanya was no more. But there is an interesting souvenir of memory that this Eddie of the earlier days has left me; for to this day Fanya, who is happily married and prospering, never fails to attend every opening night of Eddie Cantor's shows. I imagine the sad-eyed Russian girl still longs for the fourteen-year-old comedian to make her laugh. But when the alarming episode occurred she was far more anxious to make him cry.

Perhaps I shouldn't be telling these things. The modern tendency in autobiographies seems rather to conceal and gloss over than to reveal and lay bare. It would be far more pleasant for me to describe my youth as spent in a library or in a garden studying flowers. But I am trying to tell the story of the five Eddies as I remember them, unadorned and unexplained.

Luckily for me, I escaped the hat-pin, but I had still to face Ida.

Chapter VI

THREE years ago, while playing in "Kid Boots" at the Earl Carroll Theater, I felt the first symptoms of temperament. I don't know why, but I couldn't sleep while blasting was going on around me. We lived at the time in Mount Vernon, and as my sleeping hours were from three in the morning to about twelve, noon, I was suddenly torn up at seven-thirty by the infernal noises of dredges, steam-shovels, electric pile-drivers and dynamite. Mount Vernon was being built that year.

The next night I went directly after the show to the Pennsylvania Hotel to make up two nights' sleep in one. At seven-thirty I imagined it was Mount Vernon calling me, for I was rocked out of bed by the same deafening racket. I later discovered that the foundations for a skyscraper were being laid on the next block. "This will never do," I thought. "No sleep, no show."

I happened to meet Georgie Jessel that day and he suggested a nice, private hotel on Central Park West, where I arrived the same night more dead than alive. "This place is so quiet," said Georgie, after settling me in my room, "that you can hear a spider spin. But don't listen for it."

"Don't worry," I said, "I could fall asleep in a trice or even in a taxi." And I promptly submerged.

At about seven in the morning I began to dream that the coal-miners had taken me down with them into the shaft and left me alone while they went out to blow up

the mine. Before I could escape I exploded. I awoke very frightened and went to the window to find that they were digging the new Eighth Avenue subway. This was too much. Why should progress and construction companies follow in my footsteps? Another sleepless night and there would be a bootless Kid Boots.

It was my good fortune, however, to run across my friend Harry Ruby that day, and he recommended the Gedney Farms, a fine old-fashioned farmhouse in White Plains. There I drove as a desperate man is driven to drink. And I found the Ideal. I slept so long I almost missed the show. All night on the stage I looked forward to that blissful slumber in store for me at this newfound paradise of rest. I couldn't wait to hop into the car and speed on my way to the farmhouse. As I drew near, I noticed a bright light through the trees. I was suddenly stopped by a cordon of police.

"What's up?" I asked the officer in charge.

"You can't pass!"

"But I live here!" I protested.

"Oh no! You *lived* here!" he replied.

Just then a rocket of fire spouted into the air. The Gedney Farms was in flames and my two trunks burned with it.

I recall this hectic experience in connection with my early days when insomnia was never a problem. When I was asked, "How do you sleep?" I would rest my head gently on my clasped hands, roll my eyes, and say, "Like this." But now, after the scandal in front of the Grand

Opera House, the problem was, "Where?" I could not very well return to Fanya and her hat-pin. I was too proud to slink back to my grandmother, a disappointing prodigal. But it was getting dark and tiresome walking the streets. Besides, I didn't enjoy the exercise on an empty stomach. A hotel and a meal, on the other hand, involved the question of money, and money was out of the question.

It was really surprising that a night's lodging should be such a problem in a city overhung with pillows and mattresses. Featherbeds and blankets flapped from windows and fire-escapes. Carved bedsteads with satin spreads stood invitingly in orange-lighted furniture stores. I tried to figure out the bed production at Grand Rapids. I estimated that there must be a hundred million cots, sofas, couches, four-posters, Morris chairs, divans, and yet, come to think of it, there wasn't one I could count on. Even the park bench was spitefully partitioned by four iron arm rests, so that I could lie on it only in the form of the letter S, with my head under one iron bar and my legs coiled over another.

At any rate, fresh air would be good for me, so I wrapped myself around with the chill autumn winds and froze into a rigid form indistinguishable from the iron bars. I fixed my imagination on the meal that I might have had at Fanya's and the soft bed at Grandma Esther's, and soon my mind numbed into confusion. Once or twice I started, thinking I heard Ida's voice, "I'll never forgive you for that!" Then I felt Fanya piercing me all over

with a thousand hat-pins, and the cutting, unpleasant ecstasy of hunger made me squirm.

At dawn a cop's club poked me out of my ossification. My eyes were heavy and pasty, my mouth sour and dry. "Go on, get along or I'll pull you in!" I stared measuringly at the club and thought, "Why argue?" So I resumed my pointless wanderings. I met another homeless fellow, but he had at least perfected bumming into a science. The first few available pennies, he taught me, must go for cigarettes, not for food, because cigarettes had the supernatural quality of killing hunger pangs. "Dream of a feed, then smoke a butt," he said, "and you'll get the same symptoms of indigestion like after a banquet." The next point was not to be stingy about the size of a bed. "If you want plenty of elbow room, sleep on a roof!"

So the next day went as I was eagerly taking in the mysteries of the free and open life. "In our game, we're like kings—we get everything for nothing," he confided. "Can we get something to eat?" I suggested, feebly. "Leave it to me!" And he made a pass with his hands like a magician. We stopped in front of a lunch-room where the big captains of industry from the fish markets and crockery stores ate a seven-course meal for fifteen cents. "Now watch!" he said, and bravely led the way into Max Sander's exclusive Hungarian dining-hall.

The diners had all finished eating, and a gray, pouchy cat went about clearing remainders from the tables. I trailed timidly behind my friend as he made his heart-

SCENE FROM "KID KABARET," 1912, SHOWING, AMONG OTHERS, GEORGIE JESSEL, EDDIE BUZZELL, AND EDDIE CANTOR

Eddie and Ida in 1914

rending appeal to Sander. He told him we hadn't eaten for three days. "You don't sound it," said Sander, "but this guy looks it." He went into the kitchen and brought out the largest piece of cooked meat I ever saw. It was brown and fibrous like the side of a boat. He slapped it down in a huge platter and we fell upon it and it disappeared.

After the repast we retired to a tenement roof and stretched out under the stars. The jagged metal roof felt pretty comfortable after the park bench, the brick chimney was a sort of pillow, and with the sky as a blanket, I felt like a true child of nature. At last the problem was solved. I had the meal, the fatigue, and the roof. It was perfect and I slept. At least for the first five minutes I was so completely stunned that I sat up and just stared while the rain came down in buckets. My pal tugged and pulled me, but we didn't get into the hallway until we were soaked.

We managed to find a deserted flat in the building and lay down on the floor. My pal, to dry out his chill, lit a cigarette, but it was damp and needed constant relighting. Somebody who was up at that hour noticed the dancing, flickering lights in the empty flat and decided that the house was haunted. A red-headed janitor armed with a poker and a broom came up to fight the spirits. We were banged and beaten mercilessly and thrown out into the street.

There was no use. I returned to my grandmother. She received me as I least deserved or expected, with

every show of kindness and emotion. She knew that her long-lost darling would come back, and tucked me into a fine warm bed, with all the windows tightly shut so that I could sleep to asphyxiation. In the morning there was hot milk and eggs, and I said, enthusiastically, "Well, grandma, now everything will be like old times!"

"Yes," she agreed, "except you got to go to work."

"Why, certainly!" I exclaimed. I had really never thought of that. But I tracked down the want ads, marking a smudgy trail with my finger as I mumbled, "Boy, boy . . . butcher, butcher . . . clerk!" I stopped. The Weir Brothers of 25 Broad Street, a broker's office, spoke out of the page, offering a golden opportunity to youth at five dollars per week. I moistened my hair under the kitchen faucet, combed it back with my fingers, rubbed the dusty shoes against my stocking-legs to work up a shine, and got the job. It was the beginning of resurrection. In a very short time, possibly a half-year, I'd save up enough to buy a derby, a suit that would shine like oil-cloth, and shoes that buttoned on the side. Then perhaps I might be able to face Ida.

It felt like a long time since I had seen her. I had left her rather hastily that day of the hat-pin, but I could remember, in one fleeting glimpse of her face, the indescribable look of hopelessness and sorrow that flashed from it. A four-hour parting in anguish and tears could not have been more fertile of finality. She must have built a noble image of me in her heart, to suffer so when it crumbled. I was through as far as she was concerned,

and my only chance to conquer this defeat was to go out into the world, make fame and fortune for myself, and then perhaps some night at the opera I would nod coldly to her from my box, and she would drop her lorgnette in thrilled delight and invite me over. I would approach, kneel, kiss her hand, and offer her a platinum jeweled bracelet as a trifling token of my devotion, murmuring, "Ida, you know, about that hat-pin, now really, it was all a mistake—eh—that girl, she wasn't after me at all —eh ——" And she would say, "Eddie, I've been dreaming only about you through all these years. I loved you —I still do." And getting up gallantly but skillfully, without dislocating my tuxedo or the stiff shirt front, I'd snatch her in my arms and carry her away. In the meantime, like in all the success novels, I was pasting envelopes and forgetting to put in the inclosures.

On my second day in the broker's office I thought it was time to write Ida a letter on the firm's stationery:

We parted so suddenly that I forgot to tell you that here's where I've been working all the time. They like me very much around here and are making me all kinds of offers. It looks like I may soon be a member of the firm. If I could meet you I'd explain that whole mistake about the show and everything. Hoping you're not sore, I'm very sorry, EDDIE.

I didn't get an answer, and thought it was a post-office plot to ruin my romance. Louis Rosner might have come across the letter while sorting the mail. Or maybe he

had been reinstated and was back with his candy boxes every Saturday night.

There was nothing left to be done but to work on with Weir Bros. until such time as I could drive into Henry Street with a chauffeur and footman. I was about to complete a week at the new job and it felt like a long time. At last it was Saturday—pay day. The five dollars would look big in singles. I grew giddy at the thought of so much money and hopped up on the desk to do a jig for the other clerks. J. C. Weir walked in to ask why the market letter which usually went out to all customers on Friday wasn't mailed yet and why I was dancing on it. He didn't want to hear my reason and I caught myself as he pitched me through the door without my hat. Ten years later J. C. came into the star's dressing-room of the Ziegfeld Follies to visit a black-face comedian—I give you three guesses.

"How about my hat?" I asked.

J. C. apologized. "We haven't found that hat yet. But you owe me more than a hat. You owe me your whole future."

"How's that?"

"Didn't you learn how to dance on my desk?"

But when it happened I didn't realize how lucky I was to be fired. Neither did my grandmother. And on Monday I marched out at dawn, determined to get work if I had to walk from store to store to Yonkers. I was hired as a stock clerk by the National Cloak and Suit Company at seven dollars a week. Already I was making more

money. After twenty-five years of faithful service hanging up coats and dresses in the stock and show room I could see a banquet in my honor as world's champion clothing hanger, receiving a beautifully inscribed coat-tree as a token of appreciation and letting in all the promising young coat-hangers on the secret of my success. This vision inspired me to great industry, and after I was there three weeks the head of the firm himself saw me at work. Mr. Rosenbaum brought some important stockholders into the showroom to impress them with the system and discipline of his organization.

"Everybody's on the job here. We stand for no fooling," he explained, pointing with pride to his staff which had not seen him enter and was grouped around the model's revolving platform, where I stood, decked out in a lady's fur coat, wriggling my body with exaggerated feminine grace while all the employees laughed.

"Get that pop-eyed guy outta here!" roared the captain of industry. And my dreams as a stock clerk died.

I didn't seem to fit in. I was always trying to be funny even in the midst of such grave matters as mailing market letters and hanging clothes. I thought it would amuse my employers, but instead, they cried as with one voice, "Can that guy; he makes us laugh!" The world was a serious place. I'd have to put on big glasses and a chronic frown, wear a pencil on my ear and growl.

In the meantime I heard definite rumors about Ida. She had erased me from her life. She had been seen walking arm in arm with a respectable, serious-looking

boy friend. He had a hard white collar and a hard black hat. A steady, reliable young man whom no happy-go-lucky comedian could safely scorn as a rival.

It was time to act and act swiftly, decisively. Any day I might hear that Ida had agreed to marry this persistent, methodical suitor. I went to the corner pool-room to meditate. Here I met the brainiest billiard-players of the district. Fellows who could put English on the ball, reverse, draw, shoot at any angle, and make the little ivory spheres behave like tiny Golems charged with life. They could do the same with bullets.

One of them, Kimel, could shoot with the unfailing precision of a minute-man, and he could pull a gun from more places than a magician could produce rabbits or flower pots. His advice to the love-lorn would make Beatrice Fairfax admit she's a man and resign in his honor.

"They's only one way to fix them guys what's sweet on your baby," counseled this student of broken hearts and fractured skulls. "Shoot the bum!"

My mouth parched. "But he may object," was the only argument I could think of.

"Are you gonna ast him?" sneered Kimel, already clapping a pistol into my hands that he had conjured out of nowhere.

"S-s-say! Wha-what's th-this!" I stammered, starting in terror. "I-I-I-wha-wha-wha ——"

"Aw, go on, hurry up! I'll wait for you, and bring back the gat!"

He shoved me, palpitating and frightened, out of the poolroom, holding me and the gun together lest we fall apart.

"There he goes!" roared Kimel as we reached the street. "Pump him full of lead or I'll pump you for being yeller!" He was beginning to take a deeper interest in the affair than I did. "Shoot, you sap!" And he gave me a hearty kick, propelling me part way down the street. I was quivering with fear, unable to drop the gun held in a paralyzed grip, and, anxious to escape from the devilish Kimel, I began to run, while people shrieked at the sight of an armed maniac and fled to cover.

Ida, walking with Louis Rosner in peaceful dignity, turned at the cries of alarm from passers-by, beheld the frantic Romeo with wild hair and shivering hands dashing down the block, and she warned Louis to run for his life. Louis, believing he was being hotly pursued by a demon, took to his heels and disappeared. Kimel's hoarse shouts could be heard high above the general confusion, urging the heart-broken lover on to swift justice. "Get him, kid, and aim straight!"

I was running for dear life myself, but I gave the semblance of a chase, and as soon as I could turn the corner, I dropped the gun, sneaked off ashamed and completely bewildered. I had ruined everything now. I could never show my face on that block again.

What would Ida think! And I had dreamed some day to nod to her from a box at the opera and give her a jeweled platinum bracelet! What a hopeless, entangling

mess my life had turned out to be! The incident was the gossip of Henry Street for many days. The Tobiases would never live down the disgrace. That their daughter should ever have associated with a rough-neck like that! Ida was definitely, irrevocably through with me. The world had shut its doors and I was left naked and alone outside.

Chapter VII

MY ATTEMPTS at comedy seemed to get me into many serious situations. Friendly neighbors tried to explain my conduct on the theory that my head had hit the pavement once too often. In reality, I was unconsciously trying to inject humor into the cheap melodrama of life around me. Poverty, drudgery, ignorance, petty struggles, all of these entangled me in a mesh of disappointment and bewilderment. But fortunately, when everything failed, I still returned to acting.

Dan Lipsky and I formed an amateur team. We played at private affairs, weddings, bar mitzvahs, club socials, local theatricals. At first the somber Lipsky did all the comic bits while I recited the tear-and-sob-producers. Gradually we shifted rôles. I glued on a beard and put over wise cracks taken liberally from vaudeville acts I had seen. Joe Welsh's line always served as a handy opening. It appeared funny for a young boy with a beard to shake his head gravely and say, "If I had my life to live over again I wouldn't be born."

One night I'd play little Lord Fauntleroy with a blond wig and no front teeth; the next night Dan and I were both dressed as dwarfs in a dramatized fairy-tale "Snow-White." But we left in the middle of the performance when an enterprising booking agent offered us fifty cents apiece to go up to a club and do our beard-and-joke act. It took so well that the manager of a downtown music hall on Clinton Street invited us to play there for two

dollars. We went on, and every gag we tried fell flat like eggs on a cake of ice. We watched the other acts and discovered we had been the only ones who spoke English on an all-Yiddish bill. By the next night we had translated our entire act into Yiddish, induced the manager to give us another chance without the two dollars, and were received by the audience with laughter and shouts of approval. We had simply talked to them in the wrong language, and this in a general way is every actor's problem in adapting himself to his audience. Drifting as I did into every conceivable type of crowd, I trained myself to the fact that "the audience is never wrong," and if a performance failed to go across it was either the fault of the material or the manner of presentation. By carefully correcting the one or the other or both with an eye to the peculiarities of the audience I could never fail a second time. I proved this to myself on many occasions later on, when in the same night I'd perform at the Vanderbilt home and then rush down to Loew's Avenue B Theatre and be a hit in both places.

After Clinton Music Hall, however, we weren't rushed quite so hard and Lipsky deserted the stage for a job in an engineer's office, while I began to flounder once more. I still didn't suspect that I was an actor, and nobody else suspected it for me. Again I marched the streets, slept on roofs, loafed on the corners, and dreaded the want ads. I couldn't return to my grandmother's without a job and I couldn't hold a job long enough to return. I reached the point where I begged for little loans—my

credit wasn't very big in those days—and anything upward of a nickel was a large financial risk. All the other boys had definitely found their avenues in life. This one drove a baker's wagon, that one studied telegraphy, the third had a city job. Only the funny chap who rolled his eyes and made smart cracks was hopelessly befuddled and sinking fast.

"Say, Marty, will you lend me a dime? I didn't eat in two days."

"Why don't you get a job?"

"Have a heart, Marty. I'm trying to get one," I pleaded, too faint from hunger and disappointment to think of stronger arguments. "I'll get one soon and pay you back."

"I heard that before," said the capitalist. "Hey, fellers, look at this guy! He's been sponging on us long enough!"

"You ain't fit for nothing!" snarled another successful plutocrat who was a big man among errand boys.

"I betcha I can imitate Cliff Gordon better'n you can!" I cried, defiantly, my eyes moistening with chagrin.

"Say, if you're such a great actor, why don't you go on the stage?" inquired Marty. A very simple question hard to answer.

"Well, there's lots of great actors can't get a job," I argued in vague self-defense.

"Aw, can that!" sneered Harry, another creditor. "If you're so hard up for a dime and you're such a great actor and you say you ain't had any food in two days, I'll

show you how you can make a dollar. But you wouldn't lift a finger to raise a gold eagle!"

"How can I make a dollar?"

"By working!"

"Aw, that's an old one!"

"I mean it! Go up to Miner's Bowery Theatre. It's Amateur Night tonight, and even if you get the hook, you get a dollar along with it!"

The hook! I can picture young Eddie, scarcely sixteen, but already more battered and calloused by adversity than many an older lad, still clinging to the last illusion of his life, faith in his own powers. Now he might have to surrender that, too—for a dollar. The risk was too great, it was inhuman. And yet, he hadn't eaten regularly in days. He hadn't eaten at all in the last fifty hours or had a bed to sleep in. He'd have to get something somewhere or fall flat on his face. Still, to get the hook! That would mean the end.

"We'll go up and watch you!" said Marty, with a trace of malice in his tone.

They wouldn't miss a spectacle like that. They wanted to be there and jeer along with the rest.

"No, I'm—I'm not going."

"Aw, you're yeller; you're a yeller coward and we're through with you!"

"I'm not yellow! I'm just sick and—and hungry and I'm ready to faint. Won't one of you guys lend me a dime so's I can get a bite to eat?"

"We're off that lending stuff. We work for our money! Go and work for yours!"

"All right! I'll go!" Eddie felt a flush of defiance, and perspiration broke out upon him in cold drops. He'd show them! But his trousers were badly torn. He couldn't appear on the stage like that. They'd give him the hook before they gave him a chance. One of the boys weakened. "All right, I'll change pants with you," said Herman. "But out of that dollar I get fifty cents for the loan of my pants."

"O. K."

"But how'll you look in these torn ones?" Marty objected out of a sudden concern for Herman.

"Nobody'll see. I'll be sitting on them in the theater."

We changed trousers. I went to the stage door, and the boys went up to the gallery to watch the performance. It was my first appearance on a regular stage; it marked a big moment in my life. But all it meant to the Eddie of that time was a hook and a dollar. The hook would make a scar in his heart that would never heal, but the dollar would keep him alive. I can see him distinctly as he stood trembling and chilled in the wings, watching the acts go on, listening with terror to the rough, brutal clamor of the audience that drowned out the feeble efforts of the performers. He felt like an early martyr soon to be thrown to the lions.

Once or twice he heard the jingle of coins on the stage and cries from the gallery, "Take the muzzler off! . . . Go to work, you bum!" And Eddie turned in alarm to a

hardened amateur-night performer beside him. "Gee! they're giving the poor fellow the works, aren't they?"

"Oh no!" said the old hand. "He's making a hit! That's how they praise you. When they don't like you they don't say a word, but just scream."

"Have you ever tried this before?"

"Oh, I work the amateur-nights regular. I'm at London's every Thursday and at Miner's every Friday. There's a dollar in it."

So there were chronic amateurs who made a business of it, got hardened to the hook and took it as part of their performance!

I shuddered. Two players had already been yanked in by the huge iron hook and the audience let out a bloodthirsty howl. But I dared not retreat. Starvation would be the least of my sufferings if I turned back now. I watched for some sign, some miracle. It seemed to me that the next few acts, while obviously mediocre and even pathetic, were received with a certain amount of mercy. Maybe somewhere behind that frightening mass of hissing faces there was a human heart-throb, after all! Maybe, as soon as I got on the stage, I should tell them that I hadn't eaten for days, that I hadn't slept, that I was an orphan without home, without friends, without hope; maybe they'd all weep and perhaps put padding on the hook. But, no, I'd just dive on the stage the way I'd plunge off a bridge, open my mouth, shut my eyes, and get the hook. That would be the quickest, easiest, dirtiest dollar I had ever earned.

The last performer came off with a smile that seemed triumphant, then he returned for a minute on the stage to pick up some coins thrown him by uptowners who were slumming. For some reason I felt a little better. I was too green to realize that it was harder to follow a good act than a bad one. I heard the burly announcer with protruding jaw and heavy, stubbled face cry out, "The next number on the program for your approval is Edward Cantor ——" There was a loud derisive laugh from the audience. "Edward" in those days was as unfortunate a choice as "Galahad" now. Any man whose name wasn't John, Jim, or Harry had no right to live. And here was a thing coming out under the perfumed misnomer of "Edward" and it probably wore embroidered garters.

The announcer lifted a hand, "Just a minute!" he roared, gruffly. "Mr. Edward Cantor, Impersonator!" The word "Impersonator" stunned them. They were accustomed to song-and-dance acts, to recitations and acrobatic stunts. But "Impersonator"? What was that?

I, too, am a spectator now as I watch young Edward Cantor step for the first time on a regular stage in 1908. His face was pinched to a tight green and his eyes fairly popped with fright. The first menacing rumblings of booes and howls began to ferment. Isham, the mighty announcer, put a heavy but friendly hand on the skinny lad's shoulder and raised his other hand to calm the crowd. "He's a new one, boys. Give him a chance." The audience had a great regard for this master of ceremonies. At one time or another he had beaten and tamed

each one of the savage listeners, throwing them out when drunk and clapping them down when too rough. Isham's request was respected and the audience granted a moment of silence to get its second wind.

Edward began. "I'm going to give a few first-hand impersonations of the leading stars without make-up." Most of the stars he impersonated he had never seen, but he had seen their imitators and gathered his materials from them. His first was of Cliff Gordon, the German Congressman, and the lean, starved young fellow began to puff and blow in a flagrant dialect, as if he were bursting with food and good living.

"The House of Representathieves," he thundered, "giffs Admiral Perry a medal for discovering the North Pole and vat did he find dere? He finded out dat it vass cold! He could haf bought a tearmometer for nineteen shents and stayed home and found out de zame ting! . . . Nowadays efferyvon goes out on shtrike! Soonvile de vifes vill go out on shtrike, too. But can you himachin de scabs coming in to take deir blazes?"

The audience was listening, some even snickered. Remember, these things were funny two decades ago and some of our best comedy writers think they still are—and use them. Murky-looking listeners from the gallery began to shout words of encouragement: "Stick to it, kid, you're lousy!"

After a full embodiment of Cliff Gordon, the impersonator flung himself bodily into the character of Harry Thompson, Mayor of the Bowery, presiding in Essex

Eddie in His First Vaudeville Act with Bedini and Arthur, 1912

Johnny Dooley, Eddie Cantor, Gus Van, Bert Williams, Joe Schenck, Eddie Dowling, and Ray Dooley, Follies of 1919

CANTOR AND LEE IN THE VAUDEVILLE ACT "MASTER AND MAN," 1915

Market Court on a busy day. Eddie dressed Thompson's monologue with extracts from Walter Kelly, the Virginia judge; both Thompson and Kelly were headliners in the days of Tony Pastor.

"Prizzonerr befurr the barr," commenced Eddie, in his broadest brogue, "Pwhat's yer definse?" Eddie assumed the tone and manner of a young faded lass of the Tenderloin, protesting shrilly, "Your honor, I was walking down the street, minding my own business ——" "Tin dollars foin!" snapped the judge! . . . The next culprit was a pretty siren of the sands pulled in by Anthony Comstock's father for wearing too short a bathing suit. "Hild fur furrther examinashun!" glowered the judge. "Nixt! Hurry up thar, Flaherty, I gotta maik a poker date! . . ." A pickpocket came to the bar. Eddie fined him ten dollars but the pickpocket had only three. "Send him loose in the crowd till he gets the other seven," advised the learned pillar of justice. Another victim was hauled up for refusing to pay on her sewing-machine after the first installment. "Pwhat's yer raisin?" inquired Eddie. And Eddie answered with a feminine whimper, "The man told me the machine would pay for itself in time." Bang went the magistrate's gavel.

An eloquent lawyer next appeared to defend a tongue-tied foreign-born gentleman accused of stealing a watch. Eddie made his plea so eloquent that, turning around to impersonate the judge, he broke into tears. Then as the lawyer he pleaded once more, "The poor man can't even speak English," he cried. "He is an innocent victim of

a false charge! Send him home, your honor, to his wife and six or seven children!" "He's dismissed!" sobbed the judge. And the bewildered defendant, turning to his lawyer, inquired in college English, "Then to whom do I turn over the watch?"

The audience was warming up to enthusiasm. Piercing whistles and hoarse gallery cries were more numerous now. "Lay down, you're dead!" somebody shouted, offering advice. But Eddie was scoring. He was past the third pole and heading for the stretch. "My next impersonation," he announced, excitedly, "will be Junie McCree," and the audience groaned in anticipation.

Junie McCree always played a dope fiend. He had a chalky complexion, black, close-cropped mustache, and pale-blue, watery eyes. Eddie slumped into the languorous, dope-dazed attitude of the poisoned dreamer. Eddie mimicked McCree's way of uttering his words with a soft, tired drawl, dragging the mounting interest of the hearers to the laugh like a slow-moving vehicle to the brink of a precipice.

Junie McCree was not only a great comedian; he was also an originator. He was the first to bring to the stage that style of fantastic comparison which has now become a fixture of all light comedy. "I'm so broke," he would say, "that if they were selling steamboats for a nickel, I couldn't buy an echo of the whistle." He was the first to call cigarettes "coffin-nails" and matches "sulphur sticks." "Act like a ferry-boat, come across, come across!" he would appeal in his borrowing moments. "Give me three

iron men; I want to get a pair of kennels for the dogs." He too originated the notoriously murderous expression, "I wish I had a hotel with a hundred rooms and found him dead in every one of them." A wish that, some say, has since come true in Chicago.

Junie McCree would speak of his son in the same clammy way. "My boy came home, took a jab of the needle, and bought St. Louis. Take another jab, I told him, and pay the rent. . . . Oh, my boy is good to animals. All night in his sleep he says, 'Feed the kitty! Feed the kitty!' "

McCree had a better way than Wallingford to spend a million dollars. "If I had a million dollars," he drawled, languidly, "I'd buy a half a million of hop and a half a million of room rent and leave word not to be disturbed."

All this time Eddie had forgotten about the hook. It hadn't come. Instead there was the rumble of stamping feet, shrill whistling, and a thin shower of coins that pelted the back-drop and rolled toward the gutter of footlights. This was their way of applause, with leather, metal, and siren shrieks; they scorned the effeminate clapping of hands. Isham helped the young impersonator pick up the coins.

After the last act, all the performers who had survived the hook lined up on the stage, and the same hardy Isham announced that the prizes would be awarded. He went from one actor to the other and held a five-dollar bill, the coveted reward, over each head, timing his action

to the applause. At first the five-dollar bill lingered over a couple of artistic dancers, then over a singer, then over Eddie. Isham shifted the prize from one head to the other, until all but the dancers and Eddie were eliminated. At first it was hard to decide for which there was a louder and more sustained racket; then the house went Eddie and he got the five-dollar bill.

It was triumph, fairy tale, heaven, all rolled in one. In moments like these one does not measure victory by eternity. All eternity lives in those moments. Who in the wide world cared that I had won five dollars in a cheap burlesque house? But I wanted to laugh and to cry and to shout all at once. There was nothing bigger in the world to me. Herman hailed me at the stage door and we changed pants. I got back my torn ones and gave him his fifty cents rental fee. Then I took the crowd down to Chinatown and treated them all to chow mein and chop suey. A wise guardian might have cautioned me against eating three big bowls of fried noodles and onions after a two-day fast. But my new-found friends and I ate until the night's receipts vanished.

I must say their attitude toward me changed. Marty slapped me on the back and Harry said he knew all along I'd make good. Then they left me and I returned to my open-air quarters on the roof, where my bed was a stretch of cold, rusty metal under the water-tank. I was suddenly seized with the terror of death as my stomach violently rebelled against the Chinese idea of food, and I lay writhing on the roof, utterly miserable and alone.

It was one of those moments of anguish—of which I had experienced many—when the childish, hopeless wish for a father and mother, a home and its warmth of security, broke upon me in all its fullness and regret. I was a very unhappy fellow as I lay there, chilled and sick, sobbing through the night.

But even this sad anti-climax did not wholly obliterate the new vistas opened to me. I felt certain of one thing now: I would be an actor. The next week I entered the amateur contest at the London Theatre, another Bowery palladium, and was offered a regular job with the company. I was too shy to accept, for I still lacked faith in myself. I was content for the time with periodic performances, winning the amateur prizes and building up my little act of impersonations. I Burbanked the best material of such headliners as Harry Thompson and Walter Kelly and soon had as good an act as either.

I learned to please different groups in an audience and never failed to work in a popular old jingle when I noticed enough children among the listeners. Unconsciously I was following a sound principle used by the big department stores who build their clientele from its infancy, and no doubt many of the youngsters who remember the jingle have seen me as adults. The latest children audience to hear this early rhyme were children of my own. It runs like this: Knott and Shott in a quarrel got and Shott took a hot teapot and cracked Knott on his bald spot where he ought not and then there was a pistol-shot and Knott shot Shott and Shott shot Knott, but Knott was

shot and Shott was not and the rest of the darn thing I forgot. It didn't compare with Longfellow, but it also rhymed.

I remember one encore in particular that always brought a laugh, though I could never explain why. When my act was over and the audience sustained its applause I would reappear, lift my hand in a lofty gesture, and for no reason at all I would say, "I, too, am a mother!"

Finally I plucked up the courage to accept an engagement with Frank B. Carr's burlesque review called, "Indian Maidens." At last I was a recognized professional, a salaried servant of the footlights at fifteen dollars a week. Out of this salary I had to pay off an elaborate equipment of four changes, as I appeared successively in the guise of a tramp, a Hebrew comedian, a waiter, and a bootblack. The only line of the show I recall was from the bootblack number. A row of pretty girls with pleasing leg surface had their boots shined by the sooty wielders of the brush. As the bootblacks looked up at the shapely, charming legs, they sang out in chorus, "It's a shame to take the money!"

In November the show left for the road. "Indian Maidens" played for four weeks in small towns and I was just beginning to enjoy the free, flashy life of the traveling actor when it closed. We had been gradually reduced to one-night stands, business got worse and worse, and when we opened in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, on Christmas Eve, nobody was in the theater, not even the manager. He had left for New York.

I was stranded without a penny. Shenandoah was a nice, cold town with the snow falling in silent, white slivers. The air nipped and stung and swirling winds wound the flakes into ghostly shrouds. All the shop windows were decked with evergreens in sparkling candlelight and holly. Men and women hurried about, laden with holiday packages. And I trudged the streets, silent, desolate, and alone.

Chapter VIII

WHEN I first met Will Rogers on the Orpheum Circuit I used to take him down to the East Side to kosher restaurants where for sixty cents we had a fine meal that took a half a day to eat, and he rather enjoyed the food. But after a number of these trips he turned to me uneasily and said, "Say, kid, if I hang out with you much longer, I'll become a rabbi and you'll become a cowboy." It has nearly come true, for now Will Rogers is a minister of good will and peace, while I, at this writing, am out in California near a ranch.

I regret that at the time I did not initiate him into the wonders of an East Side wedding, for then we'd have gotten bigger meals for less money. In fact, one of the greatest institutions for public welfare twenty years ago was the East Side wedding, where anybody with a clean collar and a quarter could come in shortly before midnight, check his hat, and partake of a twelve-course wedding feast. With a little courage, he could even kiss the bride.

There were public wedding-halls along Clinton Street, St. Mark's place, and near Second Avenue. By a systematic route planned according to schedule I sometimes spent every night in a week at a different marriage celebration. At first the sheriff at the door eyed me suspiciously because of my shabby clothes, and I had to mingle with the wedding guests to get in; later on he had no suspicion at all,

he knew I didn't belong, so he simply winked and let me through.

I quickly learned to make myself useful at these affairs. Before the last course was served the head waiter would slip me a quarter to drop into the tipping plate with a loud clang so that every one should hear and follow suit. After the supper it was customary to read messages of felicitation from friends who could not attend. I became a popular telegram reader at weddings, a function that for entertainment and importance ranked second only to the wedding ceremony itself. For nothing was quite so necessary as to impress those present with the numerous and powerful friends that the betrothed couple had in all parts of the world. When there were no telegrams, we got blanks and made up our own.

"Here's to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Pincus," I'd read. "May they live in prosperity—from your Aunt Sadie in Connecticut. . . . I'm sorry I cannot attend wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Pincus—Theodore Roosevelt. . . . As my new show opens tonight, I cannot get away—George M. Cohan."

Occasionally, one of the sheriff's lieutenants and I would lure the groom into a small compartment in the rear of the wedding-hall and get him into a game of seven-eleven with phony dice. At first he would stand aloof and throw his money to the floor, but as he began to lose he became more absorbed, flung off his swallow-tail, and got down on his knees, while his parents and in-laws hunted frantically for him and the blushing young

bride stood under the canopy wondering where he had disappeared to and why he was holding up the wedding. He'd be losing ten or twelve dollars when they yanked him away in spite of his protests, and we had to promise him to continue the game after supper. But promptly after supper we sneaked out of the hall.

I got to be a popular figure at weddings, proposed toasts to the bridal pair, led in song and dance, and wound up by kissing the bride and even the bridesmaids. The groom and his relatives thought I was a long-lost brother of the bride and the bride's people imagined I was the principal relation of the groom, but the fact was I knew nobody at all. But there was one wedding where everybody would know me and I couldn't be a crasher. What was worse, I couldn't even be a guest. It was the wedding of Ida's sister, Jennie.

Grandma Esther had salvaged me from Shenandoah, Pa., and I returned to find that Ida and Minnie were going out once more with the Rosner twins. At Jennie's wedding, Ida's and Minnie's engagements would be definitely announced and their marriage would follow within the course of a year. Their father, David Tobias, had warned Ida against me, as if she needed that warning after all the blunders I had made. But knowing my reputation as a crasher, the Tobias clan was organized to keep me off the block of the wedding-hall.

Perhaps it was the severity of her parents that softened Ida's feelings toward me. Perhaps she still had that tender, motherly emotion for this lonely, funny chap, but

those we mother we do not marry. Yet she agreed to meet me again near the old school. But she tried to make it clear that it was for the last time. Her first act as we met was to extend a hand in parting.

"Eddie, I'm sorry for you. I'm afraid my parents are right. You'll never amount to anything."

"I'm trying to settle down. Could I help it if they left me flat in Shenandoah?"

"I can't make you out. So far, all I've had from you is heartaches and shame!" There were tears in her eyes. Maybe she did care a little. "When you were younger you hung from a lamp-post and cried to collect a crowd. Now you're chased by a woman with a hat-pin or you run down the street with a gun! You certainly are improving with age! I suppose as you grow older and more settled, you'll jump out of windows and swing from telegraph wires!"

"You don't understand, Ida. I'm making pretty good. I was getting fifteen dollars a week for ten weeks."

"Where's the money? What did you do with it?"

"Well, they took out some of it for costumes, and it's true they took the costumes, too—still, they owe me the rest. But their credit is good."

"There you are! You're letting yourself in for a tramp's life. Knocking around from city to city, living in third-rate hotels, eating stale, bad food, never knowing what a home is like, being stuck in strange places with no friends, no money, and no one to turn to."

"But as long as I can come back to you." I was getting really emotional.

"You expect me to sit around waiting through the years while you go everywhere and get nowhere? We'll never have a home, we'll never have any happiness."

"I—I'll write you nice letters."

"Yes, you'll write—please send railroad fare. Stuck again! Besides, you think I'd marry to be separated? We might as well divorce before we're even engaged. Oh, you were never cut out to be an actor, anyway!" she exclaimed, going in for prophecy.

"Oh, is that so!" I wrinkled my cap into a roll, clenched my lips, and went away. At the corner I turned to see how my dramatic departure had affected her, but she had disappeared.

On the night of Jennie's wedding I stood in the hallway opposite the Tobias home on Henry Street and watched the long procession of automobiles line up in front of the house. As was the custom, all intimate friends and close relatives first visited the bride's residence, drank a few preliminary toasts there, and then set out for the hall. Gradually the guests came down the stone steps, the men in evening dress, the women in glittering, gaudy splendor, laughing and chatting together as they entered the cars and drove away. Ragged children and unkempt neighbors leaned against rails and out of windows to behold the grand manner in which David Tobias staged a wedding. Finally the bride herself appeared in silver white, escorted by her mother, who was weeping softly.

The groom followed with his father, and then came Ida. She looked incomparably beautiful and majestic in her new dress purchased specially for this occasion. Louis Rosner, in a hired tuxedo, escorted her, while his brother Leo held Minnie's arm. They settled cheerfully in a car and something Louis said made Ida laugh. She seemed to be enjoying herself as the motor hummed and they sped away. The last car vanished down the block. It had taken an hour to see this merry party off. After that I wanted to go home to my grandmother's and take gas.

What wouldn't I have given to have a father then, a big, important father who was perhaps the sheriff at the door or the officiating reverend, a man with authority who could say, "Unless Eddie is received here as a guest of honor, I refuse to go on with the ceremony!" Why was I cursed to have no father and no mother? If only I had a mother on whose lap I could rest my head and weep. I went to bed early and cried through the night like a child.

Minnie's engagement was announced at Jennie's wedding. Jennie was a June bride and Minnie would marry in October. Then perhaps would come Ida's turn and all the time I would be standing in the doorway across the street and watch life and love and happiness pass me by. "At the next wedding I'll be the whole show!" I determined, grimly. How, I didn't know. But the following day I looked up a friend, Joe Malitz, who took me with him to Coney Island for a job.

We went to work at Carey Walsh's saloon next to the famous Roseben's pavilion and opposite Diamond Tony's. Coney Island was then, even more than now, a motley medley of social peaks and grottos. Now it is mostly grottos. The whole island was dug into love tunnels and overhung with scenic railways on rickety stilts. People went rushing about with angry faces, looking for pleasure; masses of perspiring and dishevelled men and women poured endlessly out of street cars, elevators, and automobiles; and after having traveled for hours they started at once to ride again up and down crazy tracks and through evil-smelling caves. They were mostly people who could spare only one day in the week for fun, and they had to get it quick and in concentrated doses.

They didn't even have time to laugh or ponder a jest, let alone think. It had to be slash-bang-biff all the time and they had fun pummeled into them with steel pistons and sledge hammers. Revolving in a barrel until all the organs changed places, whirling in a reel till the women lost their corsets and the men lost their shoes, riding at full speed down a vertical wall, eating frankfurters, then rocking on Noah's Ark till they got seasick—that was fun. Blowing horns, munching popcorn, drinking lemonade—that was fun. To the poor, eating is always fun. People went out for a great time and they got it if they had to be knocked senseless to appreciate it. I had never been to Coney Island before, and, working in Walsh's saloon, I didn't even suspect there was an ocean and bathing. I naïvely believed that Coney was an island because it

floated in liquor. Afterward I found that my childish belief was correct.

Carey Walsh's saloon aspired to the dignity of a cabaret. While bottles were thrown occasionally, the guests aimed only at one another, never at the entertainers. I received this positive assurance along with three dollars per night that I sang. Only in the height of the season did Carey Walsh do business to sing about. Still, for ten weeks it looked like steady and continuous employment, and nothing was ever more continuous than my singing. On a Saturday night I would sing about one hundred times, and at the beginning, when my repertoire was limited to only four or five songs, I would repeat each number with variations about twenty times. I immediately set to work to replenish and expand my stock of tunes. I spent my nights at Carey Walsh's and my days at music publishers, and while I got thinner and thinner my bank roll got fatter and fatter. But that was all I cared about.

It did not take me long to observe that the waiters averaged more for a night's work than such artists as Joe Malitz and I. For the waiters were given a $5 stack of chips for $4.50, and on every $5 in sales they cleared fifty cents for themselves. In addition to this they received tips, and made on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday almost twice as much as we earned all week. It was a momentous decision. I would have to forsake art for business. I compromised, combined both, and became a singing waiter.

This was too much for Joe Malitz. As an artist he

could not stoop to such exploitation. He quit. To this day, I am told, he regrets it. For he had a sense of comedy that was uncanny and a fine knack of showmanship. And if all singing waiters become Irving Berlins, Joe Malitz certainly sold his Adversity Common at far below par. I clung to the worthless stock, not because I had such faith in the profession of singing waiters, but because at the moment it represented all the stock in the world I had in myself. Perhaps I was just waiting for fate's wheel to turn, and singing while I waited. It would have been nicer to wait under a willow tree instead of over tables, and it might have been sweeter to sing under a balcony than under a tray-load of gin and suds, but the only balcony I'd ever known was at Tony Pastor's, so I took to the napkins and drink-chips with zest. I became Carey Walsh's pet, and years later I got a real thrill when I appeared on the stage of Henderson's Theatre in Coney Island and the old saloon-keeper, suffering from locomotor ataxia and hardly able to move, banged his stick against the box that he sat in, as he shouted to the audience with tears in his eyes: "My boy! He's my boy!"

On the other hand, my memories as a waiter have often given me a haunting and peculiar feeling, and once, sitting at a dinner between Mayor Walker and William Fox, and watching the waiters bustle about with their trays, I wondered, "How do I come to be sitting here?" When the Mayor was almost finished with his fish, I involuntarily got up and bowed courteously, saying, "May I take the dish, sir?"

Ann Pennington and Eddie in the Follies of 1918

HARRY KELLY, EDDIE CANTOR, W. C. FIELDS, AND WILL ROGERS IN THE FOLLIES OF 1918

LILLIAN LORRAINE AND EDDIE CANTOR IN A SCENE FROM THE 1919 FOLLIES

It was in those glorious pre-prohibition days that we learned how to cut liquor. Once a customer tippled over the thin line of consciousness every waiter became a prohibition agent. And the way we cut liquor was to cut it out altogether. We had a system. It was each cabaret girl's business to sit opposite a simple, sober earthworm and make a rum vessel out of him; but as soon as he became goggle-eyed and tongue-tangled, he would order gin, pay for gin, and get sink water. How modern that sounds! And what a hot drink sink water can be to a man who looks at a girl and sees quadruplets! He smacked it down with a quaff that would have done honor to liquid fire. And the girl, who had been drinking sink water right along and charging it up to his bill as cocktails, had orders from the house to look delirious and sigh with passion when her new-found gentleman friend staggered toward her and embraced the waiter instead.

At a certain hour of morning, when each guest's head spun like a miniature Virginia Reel and Loop-the-Loop, Carey Walsh's saloon suddenly turned into a soft-drink parlor; every order of whisky was filled with stale ginger ale, and celery tonic flowed for champagne. Yet with each drink the drinkers got drunker, for after the first stiff glassfuls the memory lingered till dawn. It was a great life of make-believe, and what went for the drinks went for the songs.

It was a guest's inviolable right to request a particular song and it was the singing waiter's duty to know it. There were guests from all parts of the country, and each loved

his home-town melody and wanted the waiter to sing it. Some preferred organ-grinders' classics, others chose popular numbers, while there were always those who demanded that I sing the songs of their childhood—which was long before I was born. It is to the everlasting glory of Carey Walsh's that no request number was ever refused, no matter whether anybody had ever heard of it or not.

A hardy, ruby-nosed Westerner with big ears like his own corn marched in with a delegation from Parsnip County, Nebraska, and said, "Hey, kid! Let's have good old 'Robin Red Breast'!"

"Righto!" I cried, as soon as I realized it was a song and not a brand of Scotch. "Robin Red Breast? Why, of course!"

My confidence inspired the Nebraskans and they sat down like around a log fire back home, to listen to the sweet ditty.

"Hey, Jimmie!" I shouted to the pianist. "'Robin Red Breast'!"

"O. K.!" said Jimmie. He never said anything else and he was never at a loss, for Jimmie had the rare talent of making up tunes on the spur of the moment that others take weeks to write. He has since come into his own as the versatile Jimmie Durant of Clayton, Jackson, and Durant. He is also the proprietor of the famous *schnazel*, the nose that knows no end. With him at the piano I could have shouted, "Encyclopedia Britannica!" and he'd have said, "O. K.!" and set a tune to that too.

"Let's go!" I signaled and burst into melody, uttering whatever words came to my mind first. *"Robin Red Breast in the trees, sits on a bough, amongst the breeze!"* There was one rhyme already. *"Waiting for his mate. What can make her late?"* The Nebraskans looked slightly perplexed but patient, and I steamed full blast into the chorus: *"Robin Red Breast, you're a dear!"* I don't know what gave me the idea that it was a very effeminate song. *"Robin Red Breast, singing here—Oh, you Robin Red Breast, I can tell you by your song. Robin Red Breast, birds like you never go wrong!"* Whenever in doubt, I always finished on a high note, as that brought enough applause to drown out the protests of those who had asked for the number. So I let out a final devastating, *"Oh, you Robin R-e-d B-r-e-a-s-t!"*

"Cripes!" roared the Westerner. "That's not the right song!"

"Oh, are there two of them?" I stared innocently.

This question always planted a doubt in the mind of the guest and he felt compensated, for at least he had heard the mate to his favorite number. It was good drill in extemporaneous acting and had many variations. If a truckman entered the saloon I'd break out, as if finishing the refrain of a popular hit, *"What care I for gold and silver? All I want is a horse and truck! The honest sweat upon my brow, From—from toiling in the muck!"* This brought the truckman beaming to my table and sweating with appreciation.

But as the night wore on and the crowd began to show

the merrier effects of drink, the songs became sillier in proportion, until the time that the crowd was most giddy and riotous with fun and liquor, when the drinks ceased to have a kick and the songs had no tune, no rhyme, no reason. And the game that was played in Walsh's saloon was played outside along the Bowery, where all the con games and sucker traps of the world were strung out in an endless net to catch the simple urbanite in his quest for pleasure.

On rainy or off nights during July and August, I got permission from Walsh to earn some side money as a shilliber for Japanese ball games, shooting-galleries, and ring-pitching concessions. I would roll Japanese balls and, regardless of the score I made, I would receive a huge, hand-painted set of fine porcelain dishes. "Gee! Look what I got!" I'd exclaim in loud delight, and passers-by would stop, look, listen, and fall. Then I'd go the back way, return the dishes, and get a quarter.

There was a concession in those days called, "Hit the Nigger—Three Balls for Five." I was paid to bounce a few soft balls on the negro's docile dome until a crowd gathered, and the rest was easy. The negro would make a slurring remark to irritate some likely sucker in the mob. This sensitive soul, observing the ease with which I struck the negro's shiny pate, would pay for three hard balls to vent his spleen. He missed because the negro was an expert dodger, but his pride would not let him quit before he struck a blow. The negro kept dodging and insulting him, and the heroic pitcher of wasted balls would

spend as high as five dollars in the hope of hitting his tantalizing target.

In another booth I struck down straw-stuffed cats with baseballs. For every three cats that fell I got a five-pound box of candy—to hold. But when an outsider was lured into the game, they always substituted for one of the three innocent pussies a cat loaded with lead that couldn't be knocked over with a sledge hammer.

At the shooting-gallery I took my pay in trade and really became known along the Bowery and at Walsh's as a good shot. Out of sixty wooden birds I could shoot down fifty-two. But the owner of the gallery employing me as booster, insisted that I shoot only at the big gong, which required as much skill as hitting a wall with a truck. But it was this very fact that attracted the crowd. They could not see what was so marvelous about banging away at a bell the size of an iron foundry, and each took a gun-load to prove that he could bang away, too. But my private shooting practice was more skillful, and in time I was so accurate a shot that one might have suspected I was training for future Broadway managers.

In fact, ten years later I had occasion to exercise this skill with Ziegfeld. The Follies was opening in Atlantic City when Ziegfeld, Dave Stamper, the composer of the show, and I were walking on the boardwalk and happened to pass a shooting-gallery. Ziegfeld knew nothing of my marksman's eye inherited from the early days as a Bowery shilliber, and neither did Stamper. I nonchalantly, as it were, invited Florenz to try a gun-load of fifteen shots

with me. The producer consented, but before I lifted my gun I remarked to Stamper:

"On whom will you bet?"

"Well, I don't know," Stamper said. "I guess I'll bet on Ziggy."

I smiled. It was a shame to take the money. "How much?"

"Oh, I don't know—five dollars."

"You couldn't possibly make it more than that?" I inquired, kindly, but I really didn't feel right about taking the five; it was too obviously like robbing cradles. So I bet five and began to shoot.

"I'm not so good today," I explained, modestly, as I hit thirteen out of fifteen of the little wooden birds.

Then Ziegfeld took up his gun-load and shot down three of the birds with three consecutive shots. But an accident like that I had made allowance for. Then he shattered a couple of pipes revolving on a cylinder. Then he snuffed out a flame. Then he turned his back to the shooting gallery and fired the gun while taking aim by a pocket mirror. Then he slung the gun over his left shoulder and shot that way, hitting everything and anything and asking me each time whether I could suggest any new way of holding the gun or from what position I'd like to see it fired. My eyes popped. Ziegfeld hit a perfect score. Pipes, ducks, birds, flames disappeared. So did my five dollars.

"Hey! What's this—Jesse James?" I cried.

"Ziggy worked in Buffalo Bill's show as a youngster,"

explained Stamper, "and every morning the company got shooting practice."

I took care not to flaunt my skill as a shot after that. I was pretty good as a shilliber, though. And that summer of 1909 I managed to amass the unprecedented fortune of four hundred dollars, the first savings of my life. But I didn't intend to leave them in the bank. I had endured the hard, grueling experiences of the summer to fulfill a single purpose. Minnie Tobias's wedding would take place in October and I intended to be there.

All summer I had kept in touch with Ida, trying to convince her that at last I was earning good money as manager of a Coney Island restaurant. She probably imagined that some day I would be the proud founder of a chain of restaurants or sell lunch-room fixtures. She managed to find out where I worked, and one evening, to encourage me, she unexpectedly arrived at Carey Walsh's with her sister Jennie and the latter's husband. Fortunately, I noticed them before they caught sight of me, and, quickly throwing off my apron, I assumed charge, giving orders to the other waiters, who thought I had gone out of my mind. Ida looked proudly on. She had undoubtedly brought members of her family to get a better opinion of me. But my obsessing thought was to get them out as swiftly as possible. I told them this was my night off and if they would wait outside I'd join them and we could take in the sights together. As soon as they left I hurried into the kitchen, put on my coat, and sneaked out the back door. We spent a pleasant evening together, but

I had a lot of explaining to do the next day to Walsh, the manager, and the waiters. But I was invited to Minnie's wedding.

I got the finest tuxedo I could hire. It never occurred to me, even with $400 in my pocket, to buy one. Nobody did. I bought the shiniest patent-leather shoes that buttoned on the side. I donned a glossy silk hat and rented an automobile for the occasion. The fame of my sudden prosperity had spread through Henry Street and Ida's father began to think it was his severity that had finally reformed me and set me on the right course.

I called for Ida in the rented car and we took another couple as our guests as we drove off to the same wedding-hall from which I had been barred less than six months before. I tipped the sheriff at the door, I tipped the coat-checker, I tipped the matron of the wedding-hall. I almost tipped the groom. I wanted everyone to know that Eddie Cantor had arrived.

Ida, beaming, blushing, thrilled with the new hope of my amazing transformation, went about leaning on my arm, introducing me proudly to relatives and friends who had inquired after me in insinuating tones at the last affair, but who were surprised and taken aback to meet me now. "They say he's the manager of a big restaurant," they whispered behind my back, "and soon he may own it!"

I felt the wad of warm yellow bills in my pocket. There were still three hundred dollars left after peeling off one hundred for my outfit and a wedding gift. This was all the money I had in the world, but this was also the only

night in the world. A plan formed in the shadows of the doorway opposite Ida's house, on the drear, chilly night of Jennie's wedding, had come through. I was learning the magic of dream-stuff turning into reality. Everything was coming out just as I had designed it. And here I was the lion of the party, but before I got through I would be the whole jungle.

"Come on, folks! Eddie's treating to champagne!" The news spread like a bugle call to arms. All the guests gathered around the bar with military dispatch. The bottles popped, sparkled, and rolled away with a hollow clink. At the fourth glass per guest I seemed to have grown in stature and my face assumed to them a blurred, almost spiritual haziness. "He's a great man," said the befuddled drinkers. "This Tobias knows the kind of boy to pick for a son-in-law!" They were beginning to think it was my wedding. I slapped down the yellow bands of money on the bar and ordered more and more quarts of the glittering water at four and a half dollars a pop.

David Tobias tapped me patronizingly on the shoulder. "Hold your money, my boy," he whispered, as if I were squandering family funds.

"That's all right," I assured him. "There's more where this comes from."

"Eddie," said Ida, tugging at my hired tuxedo, "that's enough."

"This is my night!" I cried. "Another round!"

The drinking ended; so did the three hundred. My reputation as a *bon vivant* and captain of industry was

firmly established. Those who knew of my hungry days recalled them dimly as out of a distant past. "I knew him when he didn't have shoes, and look now!" Luckily I had a dollar left in my coat to tip the chauffeur, unless the diligent hat-checkers had already found it.

But I had captured the night. Even during the wedding ceremony somebody mentioned what a wonderful thing it would be if Ida and I were also under the canopy. It seemed to be a propitious time to talk to Ida's father and commit him.

"Well," said Tobias, smiling rather genially at me, "I'm glad to see you settled down to be a business man and you dropped all that foolishness about acting and singing."

"Still, I may go back to it some day," I ventured. Old Tobias frowned.

"What? Now that you got a little capital saved up? All right, you spent a small part of it on a good time, but that's over ——"

"Yes, it's all over!" I agreed, staring at the empty champagne bottles that grinned open-mouthed at me.

"The rest of your money you should invest in a nice little business."

I looked helplessly to Ida, but she seemed to like her father's sound, practical view. "Of course. What else can you do?" she asked.

"But—but what business would I be fit for?" I exclaimed, my hands stuck deep into my empty pockets.

"I got just the thing for you!" Tobias's eyes lit up.

He was a born suggester. Only moderately successful himself, he had a remarkable faculty for advising others how to get along. This faculty ultimately consumed so much of his time and thoughts that he gradually neglected his own affairs and retired from work altogether, so that he could dedicate his whole life to making suggestions. "You should buy yourself a nice gents' furnishing store. It's a wonderful business!" And Tobias screwed his eyes up shrewdly.

"Were you ever in it?" I inquired.

"No. But I know all about it," he confided. "You can make thirty per cent profit on a small capital. Besides, you're just built for it!" he said, appraising me carefully.

"How small is the capital?"

"Well, twenty-five hundred dollars is a fair start."

"Oh, that's not so much," I said, carelessly. "But I still think I'm going to be an actor."

"An actor!" David Tobias showed a surprisingly irritable temper when that unworthy calling was mentioned. Even Ida was shocked.

"Young man," cried Tobias, severely, "if you don't forget acting you'll have to forget Ida."

"But, Mr. Tobias," I said, becoming alarmed, "you as much as agreed that Ida and I can get married."

"You better forget about that. What I'm telling you now is final. When you've got the twenty-five hundred dollars and you want to buy a gents' furnishing store and settle down like a man, we'll talk. Not before. Good-by."

I drove Ida back to her home in the rented car and we scarcely spoke. I didn't mind what the old man said, but I had a feeling that in large measure Ida agreed with him. In a way, I didn't blame her. Acting, at best, was a precarious career, with many hardships and uncertain returns. I was taking a wild plunge in the dark in preference to a life of comparative security behind a necktie counter. But what was Ida's attitude? Was it really a choice between her and the stage?

Chapter IX

It was surely no well-formed plan that urged me on to the stage. I simply followed my nose, and I had a substantial one to follow. Nowadays, with all this higher cultivation that our eyes and ears get through radio and phonofilms, we don't appreciate our noses enough. We imagine all they're good for is hay fever. Some of us think noses are only ornaments and try to remodel them. But for sensing the general direction of life, give me a good old reliable sniffer every time. If you're lost in a thick, black forest with a thousand tangled trails, a telescope and field-glasses are about as useful as a bathing-suit on the Sahara or a ton of bricks on a parachute, but the old Indian pathfinder with nostrils like an English pointer never goes wrong.

And at this stage of the struggle I was tangled up in a lot of trails. The ancient prophets were fortune-tellers compared with the prophets of Henry Street. According to them I was engaged to Sodom and married to Gomorrah and the least they expected of me was to become a train-robber. If I went on the stage, I'd be lost. If I didn't sell neckties, I'd be lost. In fact, if I didn't do a thing, I'd be lost.

The thought that I would have to pursue my career in secret made it the more enjoyable. David Tobias's ultimatum still echoed through my mind, "Either forget about acting or Ida will forget about you." That made the stakes very high. I promptly forgot the warning and

set to work. There was a People's Vaudeville Company in those days with a chain of four third-rate houses distributed evenly on both sides of the Jersey ferry—the Lyric in Hoboken, the New Lyceum in Elizabeth, the Royal and the Lyric in Brooklyn. The company also ran a Sunday concert show each week at the West End Theater in New York. It was a modest, struggling amusement circuit organized by a former furrier called Adolph Zukor, another furrier known as Marcus Loew who had previously conducted a penny arcade with David Warfield, and two ex-drug clerks, Joseph Schenck and his brother, Nicholas Schenck. These four partners, newly recruited to show business, had little money and less experience and were mainly backed by enthusiasm. Still, they managed to get on in the world.

The last I heard of them, Marcus Loew was still in the vaudeville business until his untimely death a year ago, and according to reports he had not done so badly. His enterprises had run into many tens of millions. The Schenck brothers had attained the front rank of motion picture production in America. One of them had married Norma Talmadge and headed the United Artists. The fourth, Adolph Zukor, was making a fair living as the president of Famous Players-Lasky Corporation. In fact, in 1926, when I met him again, he thought nothing of paying me a hundred and fourteen thousand dollars for eight weeks, or about fifteen thousand dollars a week, for my part in the filming of "Special Delivery." But in 1909 the four of them thought it a pretty big investment

when they signed me up for four weeks at twenty dollars a week, and they were careful to stipulate that the contract was effective only if my first performance at the Lyric in Hoboken met with their approval. Joseph Schenck came over expressly to watch me on the opening night, and, fortunately, he was so impressed that I played a full week at each of the four houses and was permitted to play the circuit again, provided I could change my act.

"It's a limited circuit," Schenck explained, "and we never book the same act twice in one season, but if you'll get up an entirely new line of gags, we'll let you on again."

"That's fine!" I said, eagerly; but it wasn't fine at all. From the time my impersonations had scored in Miner's burlesque I had painstakingly added bits to my act, until now I saw no way of changing a single word of it. On the other hand, I could not surrender this rare opportunity to play the circuit again. It meant another four weeks' pay. I went to the dressing-room that I shared with a couple of acrobats and a bird-whistler and stared glumly at my image in the glass. I saw my opportunity slipping and myself back on the fateful corner of Henry Street out of a job once more.

It would be hopeless to change my act. It would mean the gathering of new material, selecting and perfecting it, spending weeks, maybe months. All the jokes and smart lines I used had been borrowed from headliners of the first-class houses. If I borrowed new stuff it might not be so good. I had already helped myself to the best. There

was only one chance. If I changed my make-up. A mere facial disguise might disguise everything. With a different make-up and a different delivery even the same lines would sound different. Great idea!

But, unfortunately, I knew little about the art of make-up. It was easy enough to smear a healthy tan over my face and flourish an eyebrow pencil, but to make a beard look like a natural growth instead of a horse's tail, or to draw skillful lines and create fine facial effects like a Hamlet or Othello—that was out of the question. Besides, it would kill my act. I sat in a blue gloom, toying with a piece of burnt cork that I picked out of a charcoal can on the make-up shelf. I tried a few dark lines around the mouth and they only made me look haggard. I tried to wipe off the marks, and they spread. My eyes fairly popped out of my head. I had it! Quickly I rubbed the cork over my cheeks, my brow, my neck, my ears, leaving an oblong of white skin around the lips to exaggerate their thickness. I was covered completely with burnt cork, as shiny as a lump of coal. Black-face!

My eyes glistened, my teeth gleamed, and because I feared to get the cork dust into my eyes I amateurishly left large circles around them, but out of this blunder was born a new idea. I decided to cover the fault with a pair of white-rimmed spectacles. The spectacles gave me a look of intelligence without straining my face. Unwittingly I had added an intellectual touch to the old-fashioned darky of the minstrel shows. By putting on glasses

Eddie Shows His Daughter How He Makes Up for the Stage

EDDIE CANTOR IN BLACK-FACE—FOLLIES OF 1917

the sooty spirit of the cotton fields was brought up to twentieth century.

At first I dressed in a battered high hat, a loose-fitting second-hand Prince Albert, and huge pancake shoes, but later I brought my negro friend up North and tailored him nattily in a wasp-waisted coat, white socks, and patent leathers. There was just a trace of cotton fluff in his ears, but the night-club rhythm danced in his eyes. I leaped with both feet into the new creation.

Hiding behind a black mask, I got the booking for another four weeks on the same circuit. That was easy. And the audience, like Schenck, accepted the same act in black-face like a new sensation. Afterward I dressed as a Dutchman and finally as a Hebrew comedian, and each time my booking was renewed, though the act was identical and every line unchanged. I played the circuit so long that the audiences began to learn my jokes by heart. But Old Black-face, caught in a moment of perplexity and soon discarded, returned to serve me and lead me on.

I had worked steadily now for sixteen weeks at twenty per. This news reached home. The big city, cosmopolitan as a whole, is provincial in every part. Henry Street was like Squeedunk. Becker's candy store near the corner was like Squeedunk's country store. I was making good in my home street. Benny and Jonah and Danny and Ira had heard all about me and my fame had spread from the west end to the east end. Of course, I was only a small-timer, but the boys were loyal to home talent and made a big-time fuss. Besides, I wasn't squeamish or

bashful about my work and could be called upon to give a performance at any moment, in the candy store, in the hallway, in the middle of the block.

One Sunday, Henry Street needed somebody to be proud about. A neighboring but rival village called Jefferson Street was welcoming one of its famous sons. Roy Arthur had achieved greatness as a member of Bedini and Arthur, a team of jugglers and travesty artists that played the top-line theaters, and when he descended to the slums to visit old friends, the haughty Jefferson Streeters paraded their man of renown along the length and breadth of Henry Street. Henry Street, deeply humiliated, almost buried itself with shame in its own ash-cans, for it had no one worthy of comparison. So they trotted me out.

"Go on, Eddie, do your stuff!"

We were on a stone stoop overhung with bedding, and the audience jammed the steps, overflowing to the curb. I did not wait to be asked twice. I cast one swift appraising eye at Arthur and went into my act as if he and the rest of them had paid for admission. The crowd applauded and cheered lustily. It was a triumph for Henry Street. But I kept my eye on Arthur. What would he say?—the star from a top-line theater. He only nodded, smiling perfunctorily, and talked with his friends of other things, as if to say, "We'll let that pass." But before he left he turned to me and said, casually, "Drop around some time next week and look me up at Hammerstein's."

"Next week?" I thought. "When was next week? Today is Sunday. Tomorrow is Monday. That's next

week!" I was there promptly Monday afternoon, and during the intermission Arthur introduced me to the redoubtable Bedini.

"How would you like to join our act?" were Bedini's first words. I had to swallow a lump and speak at the same time, and nearly choked trying to do both.

"How would I like? Say, well, gee!—of course!"

"How would thirty dollars a week strike you?"

"Strike me? It would knock me flat!" I failed to say it, but that was how I felt. Hammerstein's was then the pivot of show business and the thought of stepping on the same stage with all the headliners was too much to believe.

"Well, you're hired," said Bedini, briefly.

I didn't ask when I'd start. I was afraid he'd say, "Never!" I just stayed there. Bedini and Arthur went on for their turn again and came off, and I still stayed there. I expected to get a part at once. I noticed that Arthur made up in black-face, my favorite color, but that didn't faze me and I still stayed there. Finally Bedini threw some clothes into my hands and I trembled in eager expectation. Soon the magic order would come, "Get into make-up!" But he didn't say that. He said, "When the tailor comes, give him these suits to press. I have to wear them for tomorrow matinée."

It looked as if the whole thing was a practical joke. It seemed that Arthur had told Bedini, "This kid is very clever," and Bedini, in recognition of my ability, immediately made me his valet. The whole week I never

got beyond the dressing-room. My part was all backstage. I brought up sandwiches, helped to unpack trunks, looked after the make-up and costumes. But at the end of the week I got thirty dollars. I figured they wouldn't carry a joke to the point of paying me money. Maybe, after all, I was one of the act.

I watched my "acting partners" keenly, listened to their careful discussion of every piece of stage business, and while they performed I peeked through the wings and wandered into other dressing-rooms. I was getting paid to inhale atmosphere. Stage life seeped in through every pore.

Dressing-room No. 9, famous for its size, was the clubhouse of the theater and here I got a liberal education. For no matter what rooms the actors dressed in, eventually they all gravitated to this one to be with the "regulars." Here I saw dice games with all-star casts. The big electric-light names of two decades ago would all be chanting the old spiritual, "Come, Seven!" while Bedini sat before the mirror, bronzing up his handsome face. DeHaven and Sidney, dancers; Rice and Prevost, comedy acrobats; Stepp, Mehlinger and King, the Rathskellar Trio, who sang and played the piano; Ferry the Frog, great contortionist of his time—they were all gathered here when Bedini suddenly suggested to them, "I want you to hear this boy and tell me what you think of him."

That was the signal. I plunged into my impersonations as I had done on the stoop in Henry Street, but this was quite a different audience. When I finished it was very

quiet and even chilly in the room. All those who watched me knew the originals intimately and turned up their noses at my imitations. I had reached Hammerstein's, but it looked as if I would never see its footlights.

More weeks passed and I continued back-stage. If they'd only give me a chance I felt I could go out there and knock the audience into the aisles, but I was a prisoner in a theater and all doors to the stage were locked for me. I saw actors go on and come off, excited, exhilarated; I heard the applause they received and watched them return for encores; and there I stood right behind the wings, but as far from sharing their life as if I were sitting in the pit.

But down on Henry Street everyone got the impression that I had reached the cross-roads of the world.

"What are you doing now, Eddie?"

"Oh, I'm playing at Hammerstein's," I said, carelessly.

The Henry Streeters were awed. "What! Hammerstein's Victoria on Forty-second Street and Seventh Avenue! Why, that's the greatest vaudeville house on earth! You're made!"

"H'm-h'm!" I agreed, as if that were a matter of course. "I'm playing with Bedini and Arthur. Why don't you drop in and see our act?"

"We sure will!"

"Watch for me!" I warned them. And they did. They watched till they were cross-eyed, and when I met them again they scrutinized me suspiciously and whispered to one another, "This guy must be nuts!"

"Say, who are you kidding, anyway?" one of them sneered. "Maybe you're washing dishes some place, but you ain't at Hammerstein's!"

"Maybe you couldn't see me from where you were sitting," I tried to explain. "But I'm there, all right!"

"Then why ain't your name on the program?"

"Oh, that?" I became earnest and indignant. "Did you notice it? Funny thing! Hammerstein has been complaining about that, too! He told them they're keeping my name off too long!"

"Haw! Haw!"

But I had outwaited my ill-luck. The next day Bedini told me, "I may use you in the act." My heart slurred over a half dozen beats, as if I were sliding downstairs. I could see myself already in the center of the stage with the spotlight on me, going through ten minutes of rapid-fire monologue. "You want me to do my specialty?" I suggested, trying to look calm.

"No. You'll just stand in the wings, and at a certain signal you'll bring on a plate, give it to me, and go off."

"That's all?"

"That's all."

Bedini, being the virtual boss of the act, told me to make up in black-face like Arthur. Two black-face figures would set him off better, while another white-face might detract from his central position. Trifles like these often become vital matters in the world of make-believe. Besides, burnt cork was plentiful.

So my first appearance in top-line vaudeville was to

come out at a certain cue, hand Bedini a plate, and go off without a word. For this I took hours to prepare my make-up, fuss over my costume, and rehearse the various possible ways in which I could hand over the plate. But my chief problem was how to come on and go off so that the audience would notice me and possibly even laugh at my exit, for I had already learned that a laughing exit is often preferable to a prolonged appearance. The first thing I decided was that once I got on the stage I would take my time about handing over the plate. I looked leisurely at each of my partners and then I looked over the audience in a lofty manner, while Bedini and Arthur looked at each other in amazement at my cheek. This brought a laugh, and a hand at my exit. It also raised me a few notches with Bedini.

A week later he asked me whether I knew how to juggle. The only juggling I had ever tried was to roll my eyes in their sockets, but now Bedini showed me how to roll a hat down the length of my arm and catch it as it dropped off. Only after I had mastered the hat did I try the same trick with a plate. I now devoted all my spare time to juggling, and became quite accomplished in every phase of the art. With that my rôle expanded. In addition to bringing on the plate, I had a new piece of business.

After Bedini, who was an able juggler, slid the plate off his arm and caught it, Arthur clumsily tried to mimic him, smashing the dish. Then I took another plate, slid it down my arm, caught it with ease, and snapped

my fingers scornfully at Arthur. Arthur pursued me with a hammer and I exclaimed, "He means to do me bodily harm!" It was the first time any audience had heard a negro speak such Oxford English, and it was the first line I spoke on big-time. From that moment on Arthur and I developed into a sissy-bully team, he the boor and I the cultured, pansy-like negro with spectacles, and anything I could devise to enrage him was effective and brought laughs.

Bedini now got an increase of seventy-five dollars a week from the Keith Circuit for the added member to his cast, and he increased me, accordingly, five dollars. Our act finally drifted from juggling to travesty exclusively, so that we began to appear toward the end of the bill, and we parodied all the headliners. This work was mostly extemporaneous and required quick and often inspired thinking. No hard and fixed framework could fit into such an act. Every Monday, with the changing bill, our comedy changed to suit. Once Bedini felt sure of me, he let me have a broad and liberal training. He encouraged me to come on the stage at any time, providing I thought I had something funny to offer. At first I was extremely careful not to abuse this precious privilege, and whenever I entered to interrupt Bedini and Arthur I invariably managed to score a laugh. Gradually I got so that I kept on interrupting them nearly all the time. But Bedini never objected to it and, what was perhaps more important, neither did the audience. In fact, they liked it,

I became a full-fledged junior member of the firm, but my salary remained the same. However, I got my reward in glory, for the act was now styled on the program,

BEDINI & ARTHUR

Assisted by Eddie Cantor

It was the first time my name appeared in print, and I stayed after the show to help clean up the theater, so that I could collect old programs, cut out the name of our act, including mine, and I mailed copies to all my friends, not forgetting those skeptics who had come to see me while I was hidden back-stage.

Our team burlesqued and parodied most of the famous stars of the time. In 1910 Molasso introduced the apache dance for the first time in America in his act, "Paris By Night." We followed right after him, using his set, and by very seriously imitating the high spots of the dance, we brought the house down with a roar. Here I learned one of the basic lessons in the delivery of comedy, and that was, never to consciously point one's fun, but to do one's comedy very seriously, almost grimly, and let the audience pick the laughs itself. We burlesqued Ruth St. Denis, Mlle. Daisy, Gertrude Hoffman, and I played Salome, an artist's model, and danced to Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" wearing dresses, but always in black-face. By sheer accident I once lost my dress while dancing and the audience screamed. After that, whenever I played a woman I had to lose my dress. In fact, whenever we ran

low on laughs Bedini would signal, "Drop the dress!" and it was sure-fire.

It is hard to explain in cold type what audiences consider funny. Gestures, subtle inflections of the voice, fleeting changes of expression, an upward roll of the eyes, may turn a dull line of print into sparkling stage humor. Here, for instance, is a specimen of poetry I used to recite on one of my exits, that never failed to rock the house with laughter. But I took care to look deeply poetic and wistful as I uttered these epic lines:

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star.
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high—
Oh, what care I?
Oh, what care I?"

Probably in the sharp contrast of pure nonsense and earnest delivery, comedy was born.

This impromptu mode of play was a perfect discipline in ready wit and a more solid training for the stage than all the academic courses in rhetoric and vocal expression combined. I was with Bedini and Arthur for two years, playing three summers at Hammerstein's Victoria for six, eight and ten week periods. Our longest run at the Victoria was when we burlesqued the court-room scene from "Madame X." These were my school days in the theater, and I remember the first time I met the great William Hammerstein himself I felt like a boy facing his principal. In those days the impresario's "O.K." was like a blank

check signed by the Secretary of the Treasury. He took a personal interest in all the acts of his show-house and had watched my gradual progress on the stage. He patted me on the head in fatherly fashion, saying, "Son, you'll headline on this corner yet."

It happened, but not quite as Hammerstein had expected. In 1926 at the Rialto, which now stands exactly where the Victoria had been, I accompanied the screen version of "Kid Boots" by a personal appearance at the modest weekly allowance of seventy-five hundred dollars, a mere two hundred times the salary I had earned on that same spot seventeen years before. But I'd gladly have waived the pay check to have Willie Hammerstein sitting in the theater and call out in his hearty voice, "Well, son, what did I tell you?"

In 1910 we were playing at Keith's in Louisville. The theater was short of an act and Bedini offered to oblige the management by sending me out in front of the curtain to do a five-minute bit while they set the next scene. "Go out and sing that song I've been hearing you rehearse," Bedini suggested. I hadn't sung since the days at Carey Walsh's, and this was my first attempt to sing on a stage and before sober people. I had picked up an advance copy of a new song entitled, "The Rag-Time Violin," by a comparatively new writer, Irving Berlin. Its spirit and rhythm fitted in with a peppy, lightning delivery and as I was intensely nervous and self-conscious, I walked rapidly up and down the stage, clapping my hands and bobbing about like perpetual motion. The re-

sult was something new and entirely unintentional in jazz interpretation, and the clapping of hands, the quick, jerky step and rolling eyes, have since become my trade-mark. I had to sing encores till I was exhausted, and the little curtain number was afterward retained in the act and expanded to ten minutes of music and monologue.

A few months later, in Atlantic City, we played on the same bill with Gus Edwards and his troupe of young prodigies. This was the first time he saw me perform, and as a judge of juvenile talents he commended my work. The next day Edwards asked Bedini whether he could borrow me for a benefit performance at the Chelsea Yacht Club, one of the select social centers of the Jersey shore, and Bedini agreed. At the affair I teamed up with a couple of Edwards's youngsters and most of my work was impromptu. Edwards was enthusiastic on the way home.

"My boy," he said, "you made the hit of the evening, and if you're ever out of a job, come to me!" After a while he added, apologetically: "You understand Bedini is a very dear friend of mine and I couldn't just take you from him. It wouldn't be right. But if you ever should quarrel with him—it's liable to happen, you know—always remember, you can count on me."

I began to realize that after two years I was still getting only thirty-five dollars a week with Bedini and Arthur. In Cincinnati I suddenly discovered that I had developed a terrible temper and couldn't restrain myself from slipping into arguments with Bedini. But he was such a tol-

erant and liberal master that it was really hard to pick a quarrel.

We were planning to do a burlesque show for next season, to be called "Dandy Girls," and after managing to intrude my part into every scene I complained that I had no rôle at all. At last Bedini lost his temper, too, and in an unguarded moment he exclaimed, "You do what I tell you! If you don't like it, quit!" I felt like kissing him.

"I quit!" I cried, deeply wounded, and hurried to a drug store to call up Edwards, who was playing at Morrison's Rockaway Theater.

"Gus Edwards?"

"Yes."

"I quarreled!"

"Meet me at my office in New York the first thing tomorrow morning!"

That night I went to consult my old friend, Dan Lipsky, to help me with my new business arrangements.

"I've been getting thirty-five from Bedini, but I think Edwards should do better than that."

"He'll probably give a five-dollar raise and make it forty," Dan opined. "But in order to get forty you say, 'Fifty!' and hold out for it! When it comes to paying salary, they're all alike!"

I went fully primed to meet the new manager.

"Eh—Mr. Edwards," I began, trying to remember Dan's business-like tone, "I —— You understand that in

the matter of salary—I've got to get at least—eh—" I didn't have the nerve to pop the fifty.

Gus Edwards interrupted me with a good-natured wave of the hand. "Why, my boy, I wouldn't think of starting you on less than seventy-five dollars a week!"

Chapter X

IN 1912 Gus Edwards produced a vaudeville act called, "Kid Kabaret," with a cast that included Georgie Jessel, Eddie Buzzel, George Price, Leila Lee, Gregory Kelly, and Eddie Cantor. The whole act brought something over a thousand dollars a week and that was considered high. If the same people were engaged today it would cost fifteen times as much, but I don't think the act would be fifteen times better. It might not even be as good. For none of us has remained childlike, simple, and cute.

Eddie Buzzel was then an attractive youngster of fourteen or fifteen, who played straight and serious parts. It was only later, when he found out that comedians got more money, that he decided to become funny. Jessel was a dashing dandy of twelve with a high hat, white vest, spats, and a cane, but at heart he was a child longing to play, and would have traded his whole outfit for an electric train. Leila Lee was a little girl, hardly six, who had "it," but didn't know what it meant. Now she does. Perhaps I, who was nearly nineteen, and played the colored butler in livery, was the most sophisticated of the lot. The whole troupe, in addition to talent, had that rare quality of youth and refreshing naïveté which has never been recaptured on the American playboards.

The story of the act was simple. Young Buzzel's wealthy parents—wealthy with stage money—had gone to a theater and cabaret party, and the youthful host invited

all his infant friends to have a little cabaret of their own. The company was well stocked with gifted dancers and singers ranging from the age of measles to early wisdom teeth, and it was my part to furnish the comedy while joining in the musical numbers and doing impersonations. The idea was to show that we would run a better cabaret than our elders, and I think we did. I don't know, for I hardly ever go to a cabaret. If I get the urge for night clubs, I go home, close the windows, blow smoke in my face, and charge three dollars to sit down and have somebody trample on my feet. But Gus Edwards's "Kid Kabaret" was better than that.

It was not only first-class vaudeville, but the best and only acting school of its kind, where poor young boys and girls could learn the art of entertainment in all its forms and get paid for learning. Among some of the Edwards protégées who have grown to fame are the Duncan Sisters, Herman Timberg, Helen Mencken, and Betty Pierce. Gus Edwards has done more for the youth of the stage than any other man I know. He not only schooled a large number of our present-day stars, but composed songs that suited the needs of his youngsters, with the result that he contributed some of the most famous hits of his day to the literature of popular music. "Tammany," "School Days," "Sun-Bonnet Sue," "Good-by, Little Girl, Good-by," "See-Saw," "By the Light of the Silvery Moon," were some of the Gus Edwards songs that now form part of the folk-music of our country.

Behind the scenes, Edwards managed his troupe of

Eddie Cantor as the Tailor's Assistant, with Lou Hearn and Joe Opp, in the Clothing-shop Scene of the "Midnight Rounders"

Eddie Cantor Training Jack Dempsey for His Fight with Carpentier, with Jane Grien as Referee

juveniles like a family. Mrs. Edwards always traveled with the company when it started on tour, and often had as many as twelve to fifteen boys and girls under her care. I initiated Jessel into the mysteries of bathing, and practiced my new-found knowledge of dieting on him, so that he never ate a thing he liked. I taught him to save money, but he spent it between lessons.

The most unprofessional kind of friendship developed between Jessel and me, for we always sacrificed personal interest for each other's sake. A friendship like this is rare not only in the theater, but outside the theater as well. To have one's name featured above the rest is the first thing an actor dreams of and craves—even a child actor. Still, while I was the one featured with "Kid Kabaret," I asked Edwards to feature Georgie Jessel equally with me. This made little Buzzel jealous. He balked, spoiled his lines, upset our cues, and tried to throw the act into confusion. That night I went to his room and gave him a good talking to with both fists. When he had sufficiently recovered from my arguments, he came in sheepishly to Jessel and me, apologized, and asked whether he could henceforth room with us. We said he could and he did, and the three of us have remained dear friends and pals ever since.

Throughout my whole career on the stage this was the only fight I had, except when I enlisted for four rounds at Jack Dempsey's training-quarters to give him a few pointers on his coming battle with the French champion, Carpentier. Dempsey crouched and rushed toward me in

his weaving style, and I began to speak very rapidly through my nose, muttering: "Misericorde! Pas si fort! Pas si violent, monsieur!"

"What's that?" asked Jack, dumbly, coming to a sudden halt.

"I'm talking French so you'll get used to Carpentier."

"What are you saying?" He screwed his eyes suspiciously.

"Have a heart! Take it easy, monsieur!"

When Jessel and I were not acting, we were playing. We had no outside games or diversions, so all our fun had to be born of the theater. On one occasion we ruined a perfectly boring mystery thriller. Just as the distracted father cried, "Where is my daughter?" we walked across the stage behind him, both of us in black-face, with brooms slung across our shoulders. The audience broke into laughter and the actors of the piece were mystified, instead of the audience. On another occasion we found that a newcomer to our act, a little girl violinist, was getting more applause than was healthy for her. The next night when she took her bow we were right beside her, each of us with a violin of his own, and shared the hand. Another time, as she finished her number, I suddenly appeared in one of the boxes of the theater and began a campaign speech: "Ladies and gentlemen, if I am elected the public monies will be safe. I will guard them and keep them. You'll have nothing to worry about!" A distraction like this always brought a laugh and diverted some applause. It was not very ethical, but neither is boot-

legging. And bootlegging applause is one of the oldest tricks of the show game.

Jessel and I made many plans together. We intended to write a play, but never got beyond the intention. It was to be about the Sons of Potash and Perlmutter, but we found out they never had any children. At Lake Charles, Louisiana, our juvenile company undertook to furnish the entire vaudeville program of the theater. Each of the troupe was featured separately and also teamed for other numbers. Jessel and I did a juggling act, harking back to my training with Bedini and Arthur.

For two seasons I played with the Edwards caravan in many theaters throughout the country, and during those tours I met another actor with whom I developed one of the most cherished friendships of my life. He would often appear on the same bill with us along the Orpheum Circuit. He never opened his mouth on the stage and you could hardly get him to talk off-stage. He did a spectacular lassoing act, and his equipment consisted mostly of anchor rope that others could barely lift but which he whirled with ease. He employed in his act another man and a horse. He received three hundred and fifty dollars a week for the act, and after paying for transportation the horse got most of what was left.

We of the Gus Edwards troupe would stand behind the wings and watch this tall, unknown Westerner who was always grinning and chewing gum while he did the most astounding rope tricks with as much effort as if he were buttering toast. He lassoed the galloping horse and rider,

he spun hoops around them, he looped the horse's hind leg and the rider's left arm; he could lasso anything from the horse's tail to the rider's mustache. But he couldn't talk. He tried it once by announcing his feats, and his Western drawl brought unexpected laughs from the audience. This confused and embarrassed him so that he never tried to speak on the stage again. Such was my first glimpse of one of the greatest monologists America has ever produced.

Will Rogers was a true horseman of the prairies. He hailed from Claremore, Oklahoma, and that hardy, outdoor core in his nature gave him a quaint manner and picturesque background. He seemed to be out of place, this lonely cowboy struggling along among a bunch of hoofers and wise-crackers, and he must have felt it. He was probably thinking of his little home town and wishing he were back there, but he found consolation chumming around with the Gus Edwards's kids, for we idolized him from the start, and he must have been very fond of us, too. He introduced us to the outdoors, became the captain of our baseball team, and bought us all our gloves and bats. That made a hit with us at once.

He took a particular liking to me, and whenever we met along the circuit we spent a good deal of time together. I bought him his first kosher meal and showed him strange worlds hidden in the slums that he was intensely interested in but had never seen before. The extreme East and the far West met and liked each other.

His conversation was always flavored with a peculiar

wit and style of his own, and I often urged him to say the things on the stage that he was saying to me. But he wouldn't. This man coming out of the great silence into the little cities of hubbub was still afraid to talk. It was not until some time later, when Max Hart, the theatrical agent, and I as well as a few others who knew him intimately and enjoyed his excellent humor once it could be uncorked and allowed to flow, persuaded him to try, that he finally opened his mouth and talked his way into fame and fortune.

While the years brought vast changes in Will's position, Will himself never changed. He married a girl as genuine and free from affectations as himself. It was a real love match and will always be, and Betty of the Western plains still handles all his matters. Will's children were born in the saddle and he made them ride a horse before he gave them a milk bottle. Still, if his wife was obliged —as mothers often are—to scold or talk harshly to the youngsters, Big Bill of the lasso would go into a corner to hide the tears that came to his eyes. For this calm, slightly cynical cowboy who chews gum and whips out smart lines is one of the most sentimental and emotional of men, with a heart as big as the country he sprang from. Jimmy, his youngest, is a pocket edition of him.

Will Rogers is the most charitable actor in the business and is never too busy to dispense charity personally. If I told of his many anonymous contributions to the Red Cross during the war I'd probably run the risk of being lassoed tightly around the neck for betraying him now,

but I'm sure a lot of people would like to know the full stature of this man who hides behind a piece of gum and a Western drawl. Unfortunately, all this will appear too late for his presidential boom, but here is an interesting sidelight. In all the years that Rogers played for Ziegfeld they never signed a paper between them. Rogers shook Ziggy's hand and that was a contract.

Some outsiders got a different slant on Will. When people finally found out he could talk, he got to be in great demand as toastmaster and after-dinner speaker. He always charged heavy fees for this service, and the captains of big business who paid them thought he was avaricious and grasping. But the fact is he never kept that money. The day after he spoke at a banquet he would always turn over the paycheck to some worthy charity organization.

As a rule he was always reluctant to accept the position of toastmaster, but once in his life he actually asked for the job. It was after my star had risen that the Friars' Club arranged a dinner in my honor, and Will Rogers sent word to the committee that he would like to be selected as toastmaster for the occasion.

I suspected that Will wanted the gavel so he could rap me all night; but Will had poked fun at Presidents and royalty and made them like it, so I didn't mind. It was to be a night of celebration and revelry. For dinners are hard enough to go through, even in one's own honor; but if they're boring, they're absolutely indigestible. So I

was going to have laughter at any expense, even at my own.

But when I sat down beside Will Rogers at the banquet table I noticed he wasn't in the mood for fun. I looked over the glittering hall studded with celebrities from various fields, and it tickled my pride to know they were all there to do honor to the little colored butler from "Kid Kabaret," and that the master of ceremonies was a lonely cowboy who had once been at the end of his rope. Then in one of those sudden flashes my whole life passed swiftly and vividly before me. I remembered the ragged, hungry nights on the roof, my tryout at Miner's with the big hook looming in the wings, my days as a singing waiter, my good and brave grandmother who used to lift trunks on her back to earn food for us both, and here I was now at the head of a festal board, one of those who had climbed to the top of the heap. There are times like these when I get so sentimental I can cry at card tricks.

Then Will Rogers got up and said the dinner was very good, but he wanted to tell them a story that was better. He remembered the opening night of the Ziegfeld Follies of 1917. It was my début with the Follies and my first big chance. Will watched me that night and was confident I'd make good. I did, and he came into my dressing-room to congratulate me. He expected to find me bouncing around the place with glee and liquor. Instead he saw a skinny young fellow doubled up in a chair, with his head bent over the make-up shelf, crying as if his heart would break.

"What's the matter, kid?" he asked, startled and worried. "What are you crying about? Why, you're the hit of the show!"

But I couldn't press back the tears and my voice was choked with sobs. It was the most wretched moment of my life. Through all the years I had striven toward this goal. Only in my wildest dreams had I hoped to be one of the outstanding hits of the Follies and it had happened. But now it meant nothing, nothing at all to me, for the one person in the world who should have been there to see it, whose heart would have throbbed with a thousand pleasures of pride and love, that person was not there. This would have been the one moment of happiness she had waited and hoped for through eighty-four years of the most abject toil and misery, but she was deprived of it. Shortly before I made my début in the Follies, Grandma Esther's eyes were closed in night.

Will Rogers told the story, and tears streamed down his face. "That's why I wanted to be toastmaster," he said. "You are honoring this boy for what he has achieved and he deserves every bit of it, but I love him for the way he loved his grandmother." W. C. Fields, who sat on Will's left, was crying, too, and all the banqueters sat sniffling and red-eyed. It started as an Eddie Cantor evening and turned out to be a Jane Cowl night. No group of comedians ever presented a sadder spectacle. But I was grateful to Will for the simple, human way he had turned the affair into a tribute to the memory of Grandma Esther.

One incident in her life, however, was a pleasant one,

and mainly because she knew it would bring me happiness. When I left the Gus Edwards troupe I was twenty-one. I returned to New York and confided to my grandmother that I was going to get married. She was glad.

"Now you'll have some one to take care of you. After all, I'm getting old. I'm of little use."

"Don't worry, grandma. Just wait! Everything is going to turn out fine! How would you like to ride around in a car with a nice little great-grandchild?" At least this prediction did come true.

I had worked steadily for four years, and after contributing part of my earnings to Grandma Esther, I managed to save enough to buy a dazzling diamond ring which I even flashed from the stage, cutting a hole in my glove finger for the sparkler to shine through. In addition, I had twenty-five hundred dollars in the bank.

I stared at the little bankbook with mingled feelings of pride and dread. Wasn't this the fateful figure that David Tobias foretold would land me behind a necktie counter? I had been allowed to follow the stage as a makeshift until I should accumulate enough money for a real business. The time had come for me to quit acting and get down to shirts or abandon the thought of marrying Ida.

"You mark mine words," said Tobias, shaking a prophetic finger at me, "if you wouldn't open a gents' furnishing store now, you'll be sorry the rest of your life. And remember David Tobias warned you!" Then he bent over to me in a confidential undertone; "After all, how

long do you think people will go on paying their good money for such foolishness like dancing and singing? Some day they'll get wise to themselves, then where will you be?"

But Ida was beginning to waver. A woman sees the immediate, and, after all, how many of us can see that far? I had earned money, that was certain, and I might even turn out to be a fair actor. Anyway, it was worth chancing. We cajoled her father, but concealed our assets, and being out of work anyway and having nothing to do, we got married.

We took no resplendent hall. David Tobias doubted whether I'd open a shirt store even though I promised vaguely, and for that reason he was not so enthusiastic over this match as he had been about the others. "Better not get stuck for too much," he thought, and so there was no splurging for halls, bands, or caterers. We had a quiet little wedding at the Tobias flat in Brooklyn. Only a few close relatives were invited, and when they started to give the presents I realized how close they were.

At Jennie's and Minnie's weddings there was something to rejoice about. These girls had married modest suitors viséd and okayed by their parents. But Ida had picked herself this Eddie Cantor who was only a tolerable sort—tolerable after a great deal had been overlooked and forgiven—and there was no earthly reason why the wedding should be permitted except that the two foolish youngsters loved each other, and what a poor excuse that was! The wedding broke all traditions, for the only ones who were

happy at it were the bride and groom. We found an unexpected ally in the weather, for it was June, the 9th of June in 1914, and really, even if nobody else smiled, June smiled and Ida smiled and I just grinned.

Dan Lipsky, in the meantime, succeeded in convincing my cousin Anne that she ought to marry, too. Their wedding was five days after ours, but Ida and I were already off to Europe on our honeymoon and lost out on their supper. From our twenty-five hundred dollars in the bank we deducted seven hundred for the honeymoon. We planned to be moderate and economical in our pleasure. It made no difference that I traveled second class, for I traveled with a first-class wife.

Chapter XI

ONE memorable flop came at this time, fast and early in my career, but I recuperated with profit. When Ida and I arrived in England we found that honeymooning in the fog was a prosaic business. We had to light a match to kiss. Besides, if I laid off a week from work I might lose the habit, so I teamed up with a vaudevillian named Sam Kessler, whom my theatrical agent, Max Hart, had recommended to me, and we played a week at the Oxford in London. It was the gloomiest, coldest, foggiest week I ever spent on the stage, and I am surprised to this day that the audience didn't get up and throw seats at us.

Nevertheless, Charlot, already famous then for his revues, seemed to think it wasn't my fault, and offered me a job at the Alhambra minus Kessler. I played several weeks in his revue, and scored one of the biggest hits of my life with the song, "I Love the Ladies." I had to sing ten and twelve encores with extra choruses of this number every night. My wife sat in the pit at each performance, and in the morning washed clothes, kept house in a modest way, and the trip we had taken to spend, turned into a thrift contest.

Charlot's revue was the *élite* of light entertainment. There were such celebrities on the bill as George Grossmith, Connie Ediss, and the late Lee White. It was my first experience before an ultra-ritzy and meticulous audience, and considering the sorry way I had stumbled on the

threshold of England, this was a swift and promising recovery; but then the war came.

Ida and I returned on the *St. Paul*, July 29, 1914. It was the last ship back to America before war was declared and seemed to realize the heavy responsibility of bringing us home. Laboring under this strain, the *St. Paul* trembled all the way, just managed to dock, and, landing us safely, keeled over and died. Throughout the following years, right up to Armistice Day, I was active in war work and enjoyed the distinction of being among the leaders in the sale of Liberty Bonds. I also joined the entertainment forces of the War Department and played hundreds of benefits at soldiers' camps and hospitals.

I once met Benny Leonard at a war camp, and my fighting blood was stirred. We put on a battle to the finish for the boys, but first I made Leonard eat two bananas, and when the gong sounded I aimed for his stomach. I landed such telling blows that every time I hit him the gong rang and he had no chance to strike back. Needless to say, I won, but I couldn't claim the title, as I was underweight.

Some years later, at the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, Jane Green came with me to entertain the convalescent soldiers who were brought in wheel chairs to the auditorium. She sang them one of her hot, loving numbers, after which I asked the nurses to come and take the temperatures of all the patients. I always framed special gags for the soldiers, and found that the best

laugh came from the old one about asking for two-dollar contributions to bury the second lieutenant. They all readily offered ten dollars to bury four more.

In the meantime, Max Hart had joined me in a team with Al Lee, who was considered one of the best straight men in the business. As "Cantor and Lee" we played the Keith Circuit in a medley of talk and song called, "Master and Man." It was a black-and-white act. Black-face had become an inseparable part of my stage presence. Audiences had begun to accept me as the man with the ebony mask, and I feared that the day might come when I could never take it off. I would always be Eddie Cantor, the black-face comedian, but if I ever tore the mask off I'd be nobody at all. The thought began to prey on me, but I could do nothing about it. For the time being, black-face was helping me to success and I rubbed on the burnt cork thicker than ever.

"Cantor and Lee" opened at the Star Theater on 107th Street and Lexington Avenue in August, 1914, and went over from the first. We toured the circuits for two years, getting three hundred dollars a week for our act, and after agent's commission, railroad fare, tips, and laundry were deducted, we had a hundred and fifteen dollars apiece.

The gags of this period show an advance in popular comedy over the days of Walter Kelly, the Virginia judge. I was no longer satisfied with picking up jokes and retelling them. I strove after originality and most of the material in our act was my own. Instead of copying from

others I was getting to the point where they copied from me. This is an instance.

In one part of the act I would mention my father and roll my eyes skyward. "My poor father is gone," I sighed. Lee took off his hat and bowed his head in reverence. "With good behavior," I continued, solemnly, "he ought to be out in 1921. After all, no matter how much the boss likes you, you can't work in a bank and bring home samples!" This line was afterward used by a dozen comedians.

I also had the honor of elevating "eczema" to the rank of a vaudeville joke. I told Lee, "I'd go to war for my mother country, Russia—Darkest Russia—for all my relatives are there—General Walkowitch, Itzkowitch, Eczema ——"

"Eczema?" he cried, surprised.

"Yeh, that's another itch."

Our patter consisted of many gags thinly strung together and grouped under general ideas, of which love was the most general.

"I caught you hugging and kissing a young girl," I said to Lee, and he replied, evasively, "Oh, that was just my aunt."

"It's good to kiss your aunt, but it's a dirty trick to play on your uncle!"

"Talking of kissing," said Lee, for no reason at all, except to furnish the lead line for the next joke, "I passed your house, old man. Next time when you make love to your wife, pull down the shade."

"When was that?"

"Last night."

"Why," I said laughing, "the joke is on you! Last night I was in Philadelphia!"

In a routine of this kind I attempted to embody types of gags that would appeal to every element in the audience. Sometimes a mere play on words would get a laugh like, "Your neck reminds me of a typewriter—Underwood."

The ideal joke, however, is usually the one built on actual experience, no matter how remotely. I was stopping at the Sherman Hotel in Chicago and couldn't sleep. A crowd was playing poker next door and they must have used horseshoes for chips. I knocked at the wall to quiet them, but they ignored me. I knocked again and again, and finally one of them answered me, shouting, "Hey! It's a hell of a time at night to be hanging pictures!"

We introduced a novel bit of clowning with our act which was much imitated afterward. Lee would sing a soulful ballad that I interrupted with utterly irrelevant and nonsensical remarks. After a heart-rending line of melody like, "*You dragged and dragged me down until the soul within me died,*" I asked him, "If there were any hens around a lunatic asylum would they lay cracked eggs?" He cast me a look of scorn and wailed on, "*You made me what I am today. I hope you're satisfied!*"

"I know where you got that collar," I replied.

"Where?" he started.

"Around your neck."

He loathed me for this and burst with a torrent of

Ed Wynn and Eddie Picketing for Actors' Equity during the Strike

Will Rogers

feeling into the crescendo, "*And though you're not true, may God bless you!—That's the curse of an a-a-aching hea-hea-heart!*" It was a pity to see a bald man sweat like that. "I know a great thing to keep your hair in," I suggested.

"What's that?"

"A cigar box."

It was strictly a nut act. If Lee's father was an engineer who made engines, that was nothing, because my father was a commuter and made two trains a day.

With this act I introduced the hit song, "Down in Bom-Bom-Bay," a lively pioneer of the jazz age which swept across the continent from saxophone to saxophone. I also made my début as a poet and rendered a dramatic recitation of an ode I had written to the electric light. For the sake of its beautiful imagery and note of pathos at the end, I reproduce it in full, including the title:

ODE TO THE ELECTRIC LIGHT

Oh, you wonderful electric light,
  Light that shines so bright,
When the day is over
  We turn to you at night.
A great man has invented you,
  Edison is his name;
Now you're doing the world a lot of good
  With your magic flame.
For days and days I could sing your praise,
  My love for you isn't sham;
But when I'm sitting in the parlor with my girl—
  Pooh! You're not worth a damn!

During these years my wife and I lived up in the Bronx. We had sublet a single room in her sister's flat. Early privation and the insecurity of my profession taught us to save and prepare for any emergency. Our one dream was to have a little home of our own, and with that in view we set aside thirty to fifty dollars each week until we could see the foundation and one of the walls beginning to rise. In the meantime, on March 31, 1915, our first child was born. We called it Marjorie because it was a girl.

The need for a home became more imperative, but rather than spend our slim savings on a temporary apartment, we resolved to stay where we were and fight it through to a bigger and better goal. I continued with Lee for ten months after Marjorie was born, then something unexpected happened.

Earl Carroll, who had written his first musical show, "So Long, Letty" was at this time working on a new one, entitled "Canary Cottage," which Oliver Morosco was going to produce. Carroll had seen me with Lee and told Morosco, "This fellow ought to be good for our show. He sings songs like nobody's business and covers that stage like liquid fire."

Morosco wanted to engage us as a team, provided we would come to California, where the play was to be produced. But Al Lee refused to retreat to the sticks. He had set his heart on capturing Broadway and didn't believe in Columbus's idea of a roundabout route. Our paths parted. He stayed East and I traveled West. The new

job would yield me one hundred and seventy-five dollars a week, with no commissions or side expenses, which was sixty dollars more than I was making with Lee. Besides, it would be my first entrance into musical comedy.

So I went to the land of grapefruit and joined the inmates of "Canary Cottage." The star of this piece was Trixie Friganza, assisted by the able Charles Ruggles and Herbert Corthell. It was a formidable trio with wide and established reputations. I had a minor rôle that was literally tacked on to the book, smuggling me into the cast chiefly for a song-and-dance specialty. It was the small part of a colored chauffeur, and, as is not unnatural, the star of the show tried to make it smaller.

During rehearsals I'd suggest funny lines for myself that I had stayed up the night before to work out, and both Morosco and Carroll agreed they were funny, but the next day they would be thrown out. Instead of expanding, my part was steadily dwindling, and on the race of opening night I could already see myself among the also-rans. By a lucky chance, however, I met Raymond Griffith, who visited some of our rehearsals, and we became fast friends. He took such a kindly, big-brother attitude toward me that gradually I confided my fears to him. It was the same Raymond Griffith who had left the stage when he lost his voice and was obliged on that account to enter the movies, where he made a sensational career for himself. But at close range he could still talk in a hoarse whisper and talk horse sense.

"Looka here, my boy," he said, "don't let Trixie

Friganza worry you. Write down whatever you think is funny, but don't do it at rehearsals. Let nobody suspect what you've got up your sleeve. But on opening night in Los Angeles, spill it!"

"Maybe I ought to talk to Morosco," I suggested.

"If you do," said Griffith, huskily, "he'll spin you out on your ear and you'll find your heels sticking out of an ash-can in the back alley. After all, Friganza is a big star and you're only a punk! He's staking his dough on her, and if she says thumbs down, you're down, and out, too!"

I was a faithful pupil. I betrayed nothing. When we opened at San Diego for three days to try out the show, I was just fair. I had a few sawed-off bits to do, and two songs, "I'll Marry No Explorer" and "It Ruined Mark Anthony." The songs went well, but the dialogue barely toddled along.

But on the opening night in Los Angeles I sprang the surprise. I had fifteen entrances and exits in the show, and each one clicked with a clang. When I came on to dust the furniture I also dusted the fruit bowl and the fruit, and, taking up three oranges, I did my juggling act from the Bedini and Arthur days. On another exit I worked in my ventriloquist bit that I had developed while with Gus Edwards. A third time, as Trixie Friganza, who was all dressed in white and weighed about two hundred and forty pounds, left the stage, I exclaimed, looking after her: "My God! A milk wagon!" The plan was to make my absence from the stage felt and to win a hand if pos-

sible at every exit. I had prepared a number of new extra choruses for my songs, and each went better than the previous one. In the limited domain of "Canary Cottage" I had made a rash but successful *coup d'état.* The singing colored chauffeur was the hit of the night.

After the performance, Oliver Morosco came backstage and visited each dressing-room to congratulate the actors, but he did not come to mine. I was heartbroken, despondent, and realized that my nerve had probably been my undoing. But that night Morosco came to my room in the hotel. "Eddie," he said, "stay one year with me and I'll make a big star out of you. My boy, you're the apostle of pep!"

A week later I received word that another child was born to me. I had planned to call him Michael, after my father. But I compromised on Natalie when I learned it was a girl. Charles Ruggles observed, "I guess you're disappointed it wasn't a boy." "With a fellow like me," I told him, "I'm lucky it wasn't a rabbit."

I stayed on for five more months with "Canary Cottage." Natalie had joined us April 27, 1916. It was now September and I had not yet seen her. I was growing more and more homesick and kept up a steady stream of letters and wires to my wife and Max Hart to get me back to New York if I had to be kidnapped.

Finally my wife, her sister, and Max Hart worked out a plan among themselves. I was sent an alarming wire saying that Ida was in a grave condition. I went to Morosco, showed him the telegram, and wept bitterly

upon his shoulder. I was giving up a good job, a fast-growing reputation, only to be near my family once more. He wept with me and let me go.

I was packing my trunk when a message arrived from Hart. "This is your big chance," he telegraphed. "Ziegfeld has booked you for twenty weeks on the Amsterdam Roof in the Midnight Frolics." A season with Ziegfeld! My heart beat a loud tattoo of triumph. The most undreamed-of good fortune had suddenly fallen like manna into my lap. I flew on wings of new hope across the country. Could it be possible? Twenty weeks—a season —signed in advance!

Only after I arrived in New York did I learn that Ziegfeld hadn't signed me at all. He had only agreed to give me a single night's trial and on that trial depended whether he would engage me or not. He bound himself to nothing. And I staked everything on one night.

Chapter XII

When I met Max Hart he was shrewd enough not to tell me beforehand how much depended on my first-night showing. He let me ease along on the assurance of a twenty-week job. Had I suspected the odds I was facing I might not have been able to overcome my nervousness. Instead, I met Ziegfeld with an amazing air of confidence. He wanted to see me rehearse my act, but I startled him with the assertion that I never rehearse.

"What do you do?" he inquired, skeptically, with his characteristic nasal twang.

"Oh, I'm marvelous!" I replied.

"How do you know?"

"Why, Mr. Ziegfeld, I wouldn't lie to you!"

He probably decided right there and then: "This fellow is a queer duck. I'll let him on and take him off and that'll be the end of him!"

The Amsterdam Roof was a unique pleasure center, neither theater nor cabaret, but a blend of both. It was a supper club where it cost a person five dollars just to sit down and a good deal more to get up. A five-dollar cover charge in 1916 makes even our present night clubs look like cafeterias. It was an intimate, yet cold and *blasé*, crowd, composed chiefly of the Four Hundred who thought it banal to be amused and dared you to do it.

There were the Vanderbilts, the Harrimans, the Astors, and other distinguished families of little old New York. They combined with their pleasure a degree of aloofness

and aristocracy that made it difficult for a comedian, and especially a new one, to catch just the right note of intimacy that would not be offensive and comedy that would not be common. But strengthened by the thought of a twenty-week guaranty, I felt like one of the partners in the place and went at the Four Hundred like the charge of the Six Hundred.

My first bit of business was to appear with a deck of cards like a sleight-of-hand artist, and gravely ask some of the guests to assist me in my act. I gave a few cards to William Randolph Hearst, a few to "Diamond Jim" Brady, and a few to Charles B. Dillingham, and instructed them to hold the cards up high so that the rest of the audience could see them clearly, and then I began to sing, "Oh, how she could yacki hicki wicki wacki woo!"

Throughout the whole number the three men faithfully held up their cards, not daring to move or lower them, for fear they should spoil my trick. Laughter gradually spread among the other guests as they began to realize that the cards had nothing whatever to do with the song or with anything else, and after I had finished a number of choruses I collected the cards from them and thanked them for their assistance. They were three of the best straight men I ever had.

My nut act scored, and for twenty-seven weeks I played in the Midnight Frolics. After the third or fourth night I discovered that my comedy did not bring the same volume or quality of laughter. The patronage of this exclusive gathering was limited and the same people came

several times a week. This required a complete overhauling of my material almost every day. I would have to have something new all the time.

Here I met Will Rogers once more. He had begun to talk now. But it felt like old times to be together on the same bill, though we had risen many rungs in the climb. I noticed that every dawn after the Midnight Frolics, Will would buy the morning newspapers, read the interesting and important items of the day, and build his political and social comedy out of the news materials. Each morning he had his new act completely framed for the following night. He was a tireless worker and taught me two very valuable principles in the craft of acting. One was that a timely joke, even if it is not so funny, is better than a joke bearing no relation to the times.

I had no better evidence of the effectiveness of a timely jest than when I observed, during Wilson's administration, after his second trip to Paris, that, "Presidents may come and Presidents may go, but Wilson does both." This line was afterward illustrated with a cartoon and reprinted in a thousand daily newspapers throughout the country.

Another pet slogan of Will's was that an actor is as good as his material. He followed these thumb rules himself, always built his gags out of the daily stuff of life, and was most careful to select the finest material. With the limited audience of the Frolics very few actors lasted more than two or three weeks, for most of them had a set specialty or fixed routine, and when the novelty

passed off they passed on. But Will Rogers always had something new to offer and I took the cue from him.

Finally I received my graduation diploma and went down to the Ziegfeld Follies. My salary was doubled, from two hundred to four hundred dollars a week, and my work was more than halved. On the opening night of the Follies of 1917 I introduced the song hit, "That's the kind of a baby for me," of which I never did less than ten encores. I had adopted a fast, lightning style of song delivery and the audience seemed to lay bets on what chorus I'd drop in and have to be carried out.

Two years later, the Prince of Wales attended the Follies of 1919 as a guest of the Vanderbilts and he sent word back-stage that he would like me to sing, "That's the kind of a baby for me." We didn't have a copy of the song on hand or the orchestrations, but we held up the show till they were dug out of some old trunks and I sang the song again.

While waiting for the music copies to arrive, I tried to explain the delay to the audience in a tactful way. "I've been asked not to mention the fact that a distinguished member of British royalty is with us tonight," I said, and looked toward the Prince. "But I want him to know if he leaves New York without seeing the Bronx, he'll be sorry all his life!"

The Prince leaned over to Mrs. Vanderbilt and I could hear him ask, "What are the Bronx?"

During the intermission I stood back-stage with Eddie Dowling and we plotted together. "If the Prince comes

through here," I suggested, "I'll get at his throat and squeeze till he gives Palestine to the Jews; then you squeeze till he gives Ireland to the Irish." A Secret Service man planted in the wings glared menacingly at us and nipped our conspiracy in the bud. But the Prince must have heard us, because both things have happened since.

On January 31, 1917, a few months before I opened in the Follies, my grandmother died. She never had the satisfaction of knowing I had attained a measure of success. I had contributed all I could to relieve her from work in the latter years, but she still labored on by herself, a lonely, quiet woman with suppressed and inscrutable emotions. She had spent eighty-four years of hard, soul-bruising toil upon the earth, raising children, reviving their wounded spirits, fighting for them in the struggle for existence, and when she passed silently away there was no booming of cannon or military honors at her bier. But to me she is still the noblest type of soldier that ever fought for the only virtues in the world worth while—the relief of suffering and the preservation of her dear ones, without inflicting pain or discomfort on any living soul but herself.

I had taxed her love and endurance to the uttermost and was never able to repay her in the slightest way. The irrevocable tragedy of this tore a painful hollow in my heart. Recently I have made contributions in her memory to a home for the aged and have endowed a room in her memory at the Jewish Hospital of Brooklyn. There

is a comfort in the thought that some equally poor and destitute soul may get the relief that was denied to her.

Ida and I and our two children still lived in the one-room annex to her sister's flat. My work was now boiled down to seven minutes. Ida would ride to the theater with me, wait while I went on the stage for a seven-minute bit, and then we would go home together. In the last Follies, of 1927, the situation was reversed. I was off the stage about seven minutes, and if I could play an instrument, Ziegfeld would have had me in the overture. As I told Jessel, "Drop around to the Amsterdam Theater whenever you like; I'm always on."

With my début in the Follies things began to change. After my number and sketch with Bert Williams, I was a free agent and took on assignments in the most varied social circles of the city. One night I would entertain at the Vanderbilt home, and the next night at a Bronx lodge dinner. Within the span of four hours I would play at Henry Rea's palatial home in Southampton and cover an East Side wedding in Beethoven Hall. It was excellent drill in impromptu performance and swift adaptation to surroundings.

Earning four hundred dollars a week plus side income felt rather good. We hadn't enough yet for our own home, but we no longer cared. We grew prodigal with prosperity. I bought a car, hired a chauffeur, and motored down to the stage entrance in style. My sister-in-law lost a tenant and we settled in our own flat. There was, of course, the first meal my wife cooked—horse's hip on

toast—and the tears and the tragedy that followed her disappointment and my indigestion. Right then and there I resolved that I would have to earn enough to pay for a cook. It would save Ida's face and save my life. Things were breaking in a grand manner. I was beginning to live the life of a successful New Yorker; a car, a chauffeur, a cook in the near future, and money steadily pouring from the tap.

On the stage, things were getting better all the time. I was playing in a sketch with Bert Williams and my association with him was a joy and an education, for Bert was not only a great actor, but a great and liberal teacher. He was the whitest black man I ever knew and one of the finest artists the musical comedy stage has ever had. When high salaries were low Bert got a thousand dollars a week. He was the grand old man of minstrelsy, and on his European tours he appeared before all the royal rulers.

He had a unique way of rendering songs, injecting his talk between rests and catching up with the melodic phrase after he had let it get a head start. His knack for rhythmic timing was inherent and has never been excelled. We were sonny and papsy on the stage and off.

In our sketch he played a porter of the Grand Central Station who had collected enough tips to send his son to a first-rate university, and expected the stalwart youth to return with football honors and at least the weight-throwing championship. After these fond expectations I entered, slight and effeminate, with white-rimmed glasses and mincing step.

"Daddy!" I cried in a girlish treble, and Bert said, glumly, "Uh-uh! . . . So you been to college!" And he would look me over with a dismal air. But I replied, airily, "Look, daddy, I carry matches!"

At this, the tough old porter fidgeted his fingers nervously into a fist the size of a brick, but I started with a shrill cry of warning, "Remember, daddy, I have a temper!"

Bert growled, "I'll show you where you got it from!"

The last line of the skit represented the perpetuation of the species. The old porter turned to his college-bred son and, putting his porter's hat on the latter's head, he thundered: "Pick up them bags! This is my graduation and your commencement!"

Bert Williams was not only a great comic, but extremely human and possessed of fine sensibilities. It happened in St. Louis that he walked up to a bar and asked for gin. The bartender, reluctant to serve a negro, said, "I'll give you gin, but it's fifty dollars a glass." Bert Williams quietly took out his bill-fold and produced a five-hundred-dollar bill. "Give me ten of them," he said.

Pop Rosenbaum, who had been the manager of the Follies troupe for years, came in at that moment and cried, "Hello, Bert!" The bartender, who knew Pop, now recognized Bert Williams and grew flustered. "I'm awful sorry," he stammered, "but those are my orders—not to refuse, but to make the price prohibitive." Bert asked the bartender to join him in a drink and they became good friends.

On another occasion, Will Rogers, W. C. Fields, Bert Williams, and I, while playing in Buffalo, were invited for supper, after the show, to the home of Jack "Twin" Sullivan, one of the old-time fist-swinging champions. I didn't know that I had been selected by the host and my white friends as the butt of the evening for a practical joke, but I soon noticed that something was wrong.

We were starved and clamored for food, but the first dish set before me was pork chops, which for me was taboo. Jack Sullivan asked, kindly, "Why don't you eat, Eddie?"

"Oh, I'll just have bread," I explained, watching the others enjoy themselves.

"I'm sorry," said Jack. "We'll get you something else." He brought me a nice thick sandwich, but it turned out to be ham.

"I really haven't much of an appetite," I protested, faint with hunger.

"Aw, come on! You'll have some eggs," urged Jack.

"All right."

He ordered them for me, but they appeared all covered with bacon. I was the youngest of the group and looked like a kid who was being bullied. Rogers and Fields rather enjoyed my predicament and Jack gave the trick away with a grin, followed by a loud guffaw. I felt foolish. It had ceased to be a joke. I was hungry to the point of physical pain.

Bert Williams leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Son, there's a package in my coat for you." I suspected that this was a new trap, but decided to be game. I went

into the hall and found a package in the pocket of Bert's coat. It was a brown paper bag and in it, Bert, the good old soul, had brought a sirloin steak. He knew of the joke to keep me without food and had come prepared.

"They've had a laugh, now you have a steak," he said, gleefully, and went into the kitchen to broil it for me himself.

Bert Williams was king of the old-time blackface comics and in the Follies of 1919 he headed probably the greatest and most majestic minstrel spectacle of all time. A few years later, while playing with a Shubert production in Detroit, Bert passed away, and with him passed the last and greatest of the Swanee troubadours.

There was a warm, fraternal feeling among the members of the Follies in those years, and the older actors took a personal pride and pleasure in coaching and helping the younger ones along. While playing with the Follies of 1917 I would return for short engagements to the Midnight Frolics. During one of these periods Will Rogers and I played a few small sketches that we worked out together. They were mainly along the lines of light nonsense and travesty. In one bit we impersonated Dillingham and Ziegfeld, rival producers; in another, Will Rogers impersonated me, clapping his hands and dancing up and down while I impersonated him with his rope and chewing gum. We finished our act with a duet entitled, "Oh-oh-oh-oh!" that was, fortunately, not so painful as it sounds.

In return for my early treats to kosher restaurants,

MARIE CALLAHAN AND EDDIE IN THE "WEDDING MARCH"—
"KID BOOTS"

Eddie Cantor as "Kid Boots"

Rogers now broke me in to eating at swell hotels. Things were happening fast and frivolous. But peculiarly enough, though I earned more than before, I was saving less. I had plenty of money, but it was slipping through my fingers like sand. I took stock tips and invested in cream-puff copper, a soft thing. It was so soft, all my money sank into it. I bought shares of no par value, and they were true to name. I was trying to get rich quick, and how Wall Street loves that kind!

On the other hand, the whole of Henry and Madison Streets had been informed of my phenomenal rise to wealth and station, and the whole category of jobless actors made it their business to be informed, too. Every Saturday afternoon when the pay envelope arrived, I was greeted at the stage door by a host of admiring friends eager to congratulate me, patting me and touching me for all they could. One fellow needed fare to St. Paul, Minnesota; another one had to pay back-rent or move to the park; a third one's life depended on an operation. I broke one hundred-dollar bill, then another. Before I got to the corner I was earning little more than my chauffeur. Week in, week out, this startling charity work continued, gaining in popularity and cost.

Some people who-knew-me-when, but whom I hardly knew, were in the clothing line and had to be tided over rough periods. It gave me a genuine thrill to help some old acquaintances, particularly the restaurant man who had given me my first meal after three eatless days in the park. But for the most part, I was breeding an increasing swarm

of down-and-outers who had found in me good pickings, and I used to arrive in our six-room flat on 168th Street completely picked to pieces.

The vision of a home and savings, peace and security, had faded into a mad jumble of worthless paper stocks and ragged, hungry, devouring friends. I had succeeded, and yet I was nowhere. My money poured like water through a sieve and I was the sieve.

We were four now. Ida, Marjorie, Natalie and I. The tide of prosperity and reckless living was sweeping us along, with no solid footing anywhere and everything rolling pell mell downstream. While playing in Chicago I got a sudden attack of pleurisy. A doctor offered to pierce my chest with a long needle, but I declined the offer. My chest felt as if a thousand needles were piercing it already, so why add another?

I was confined to bed for many weeks before I could return to New York. My condition was seriously weakened and doctors ordered a protracted rest. I had to quit the show. It seemed as if my whole career had suddenly been cut off. I was a sick man, out of a job, my investments wiped out, no savings left, and all I had done and dreamt and hoped for took on the form of cheaply gilded shares with the mocking words across them, "No Par Value."

Chapter XIII

MY PHYSICAL condition was bad, but my financial condition was worse. My oils and coppers had turned to muddy waters and I had lost eleven thousand dollars —all I had. I lay on my back with a sharp pain in the chest, and don't remember whether it was my pleurisy or investments that hurt more.

While convalescing, I began to make resolutions. I would regulate my life according to a system. I'd save all my future earnings in a bread-box and at dead of night I'd hide it under planks in the floor. Then let the brokers try and get it! On pay day, when the borrowers gathered in convention at the stage door, I would hobble out in disguise with a beard and a crutch, and once I got past them I'd run for my life. But something happened unexpectedly and it changed all these elaborate plans.

One day I got a telephone call from my old friend, Dan Lipsky. He was now working as a stenographer at the Manufacturers Trust Company and had something important to tell me. While I traveled with the Follies, Dan and I had often corresponded, but since each of us had married we had seen little of one another, and I wondered what he would have to say. I remembered him from the earliest days with a pencil and pad, calculating his way through life.

When he quit being my acting partner at fifty cents a performance be became an office boy at six dollars a week. Like the loyal and industrious employe that he was, he

held the job for two years and three months before he discovered that stenographers got better pay. Once he discovered this, he promptly bought a Pitman shorthand book and began to study. He made a wager for one dollar with his mother that he would know shorthand in a month. The book had a hundred and fifty pages, so he divided it by thirty days and methodically covered five pages a night. In one month's time he was a stenographer, won the dollar, and got a raise to eight dollars a week, working for a human-hair concern. He became expert at dictation, taking the usual business letters that read in the main, "Dear Sir: Your inquiry to hand and beg to state that we have a special new wig for Sundays to match your spats." Or, "Dear Madam: Under separate cover we shipped you this day three light-brown switches, a half dozen rats, and eight curls guaranteed not to shrink, fade, or unwind in the wash." But this romantic industry was ruined by hair-cuts and Dan Lipsky was out of a job.

He took a city examination in stenography and ranked third out of thirty-thousand Pitmanites, getting a position in the Bureau of Licenses. A few years later he became confidential secretary to Edward Riegelmann, then Borough President of Brooklyn. During all this time he was making mental notes as well, and saw his opportunity when the Victory Celebration Committee was apointed to receive the home-coming heroes of the World War. Nathan S. Jonas, a figure of growing prominence in Brooklyn public and commercial life, was chairman of this committee and Dan spent restless nights hatching plans how he could get

near the mighty Mr. Jonas and be associated with him in this work.

In the meantime he had married my cousin Anne, when he earned seventy-five dollars a month, and they immediately began to save a dollar a week, having their first fifty dollars at the end of the first year. As Dan is to me a remarkable study in thrift and self-management, I give his career in detail as an object lesson to the other ten million office boys, stenographers, and small wage earners, that they may realize what a lesson it was to me. For when I earned four hundred dollars a week and barely managed to make ends meet, Dan already had comfortable savings and wise investments on something like one-tenth of my salary.

After a good deal of discouragement and difficulty, Dan managed to get the job as executive secretary to the reception committee. Nathan S. Jonas commented favorably on his work and Dan already had visions of entering the banker's huge financial organization. But when the confusion and enthusiasm of the reception were over and the committee's work was through, so was Dan; and one day he found himself out in the chilly atmosphere with no job, and no alternative but to return to the borough president's office and hang his hat a peg lower.

Instead, he wrote Mr. Jonas a letter and won a hearing. Mr. Jonas was very kind but brief, and regretted that he could see no opening in the bank for Dan. This was the big moment. Some one else might have shrunk from view, like cheap flannels in a rain, but Dan didn't.

He remembered our acting days together, and put over one of the most dramatic bits of his career. He talked so fast, so long, and so well that Nathan S. Jonas, who had once been an insurance agent himself, was sold on a Lipsky policy and agreed to invest a small premium on the young man's chances.

Dan was ostensibly hired as a stenographer, but never got any dictation. Jonas already had more stenographers than he could possibly dictate to, and Dan spent his time reading all the magazines and sitting on all the chairs. He suspected that unless he got work quick he'd get the works quicker, and asked for permission to employ himself in his own way. "Oh yes, you're the stenographer I hired," said Jonas, reminiscently. "Well, go ahead. Make yourself useful."

This was Dan's passport. He started on a tour of the organization, spending several weeks in each department, familiarizing himself thoroughly with the work from every angle. A few months later he returned to Mr. Jonas and said, "I believe I am now thoroughly familiar with the business and system of the Manufacturers Trust Company." The rest happened strictly according to the books. Mr. Jonas made him his private secretary, and today Dan is one of the vice-presidents and important executives of the Manufacturers Trust Company—proving again that Horatio Alger did not live in vain.

But when Dan came to see me he was still a stenographer, earning about fifty dollars a week. He offered to handle my finances and regulate my affairs. I showed him

my copper and oil shares and he said they were wonderful works of art. Then I told him of all the loans I had made to friends who had wept on my shoulder as I left the theater.

"What collateral did they give you?" he inquired.

"Collateral?" I got scared. "Oh, they couldn't stick me with that stuff!" I assured him. "I'll admit I fell for tears and handshakes, but do I look as if I'd fall for collateral?"

Dan took a deep breath. "Let's proceed," he said.

"Luckily," I told him, "I'm not in debt."

"Then we'll put you in debt."

"What? You'll put me in debt?"

I thought that was his way of being funny, but he spoke quite gravely, "That's the only solution for a fellow like you. You've got to be in debt!"

"Say, that kind of financial advice I can give myself!"

But Dan sat unmoved and continued in his dry, quiet tone, "You owe the Manufacturers Trust Company ten thousand dollars."

I started suspiciously, "Since when?"

"And you've got to pay it off at the rate of two hundred and fifty dollars a week out of your four-hundred-dollars salary."

"Just a minute! What kind of a game is this? I owe nobody anything."

"Well, I'll take you down to see Mr. Jonas and you'll find out." I began to get worried. This game of financing didn't look very healthy to me. He hadn't even

promised to make me a millionaire in six months. On the contrary, I was in debt ten thousand dollars just for talking to him!

"Listen, Dan," I said, trying to keep calm, "I'd be pleased to meet Mr. Jonas, but what I really thought you'd do is to help me save enough to buy a house."

"Yes," assented Ida, who had joined the conference, "that's been the dream of our lives—to have our own home."

"If you do what I tell you," said Dan, "you'll have your own home within two years. What day is today?" And he looked at his watch.

"That sounds very good, but how? I owe ten thousand already, and now I'll owe for a house, too, that I haven't got."

"How much do you need to live on?" asked Dan.

Ida and I began to track down our expenses. It seemed that all we did was to send things to the laundry, and still that didn't account for the whole four hundred. Gradually, by consenting to sell the car, and the chauffeur along with it, and sticking as closely as possible to eating, drinking, and sleeping, we got the budget down to a hundred and fifty a week.

"That's fine," observed Dan. "You'll get a hundred and fifty dollars a week and not a penny more. The rest you pay on your debt."

"Then how can we save for the house?"

"You don't have to save for it. It comes by itself."

"Gee! This is worse than cream-puff copper!" I thought to myself.

"And furthermore," said Dan, "you get Ziegfeld to pay you by check instead of cash, and I'll come every Saturday and grab the check before the line forms at the stage door."

"And for all these services of putting me in debt and grabbing my check and getting me a house that'll come by itself, how much do I owe you?"

"Ten dollars a week."

"That's the only reasonable part about the whole arrangement. It's too reasonable!" I was inclined to suspect that Dan, in his eagerness, was trying to practice his new-found banking knowledge on me and didn't know how. Still, his authoritative business manner impressed me and I agreed to try. I met Nathan S. Jonas, a man of natural dignity, whose strong, intelligent face was permeated with a warmth of good-nature that made him at once imposing and intensely human. He spoke in a genial, fatherly way that immediately spoiled my pet notion of a banker as I had pictured him. He didn't smoke fat cigars or wear a big chain across his abdomen to prevent him from skidding, nor did he press a lot of buttons so that I should fall through a trap-door after he had my money. In fact, I didn't owe him a thing yet. But I was going to. Oh yes, I was going to!

He agreed with Dan that I should buy ten thousand dollars' worth of Victory Bonds and that the Manufacturers Trust Company would finance the purchase with the

understanding that I owed them the money and would pay it off in forty weeks at the rate of two hundred and fifty dollars a week. "The only way you can save," said Mr. Jonas, kindly, "is to be compelled to save. So we're putting you in debt to yourself. You owe yourself two hundred and fifty dollars a week that must be paid."

It was my first real transaction, wise, safe, profitable. I returned to the Follies and every pay day Lipsky arrived at the New Amsterdam Theatre to take the check. It was a real thrill to me the first week when I saw one hundred and fifty dollars come for the household and two hundred and fifty go to the United States Government for Victory Bonds. In forty weeks I owned ten thousand dollars that were working for me night and day in the service of the richest and strongest government on earth. In the meantime I had been raised to six hundred dollars a week, and Dan pointed out that I should buy as many shares as possible of the Manufacturers Trust Company stock. They were at that time a hundred and seventy-two dollars a share. Besides many rights that accrued to me, they are today more than nine hundred dollars a share and proved to be the bulwark of the modest little fortune that I gathered in less than ten years. Today I am one of the large stockholders in the Manufacturers Trust Company.

Dan Lipsky, with his earnings, which at the time were not more than sixty dollars a week, made similar investments to mine on a proportionately smaller scale; and I am convinced that anyone, no matter how modest his

income, providing it is regular and budgeted, can and should set aside a sum for sane and sound investment as I did. Regardless of what bank or trust company he may go to, providing it is a legitimate institution of finance of established reputation, he will always receive the most expert advice, and instead of shaky and shady investments, his money will always be safe and the bulwark of his future secured.

A sense of growing security inspired me. I was building my house upon a rock rather than public whim. For the fortunes of my career might vary and the day might come when I'd walk out on the stage and the audience would say, "Cantor, you're through. Go home." And I'd answer, "O.K. We owe each other nothing." I'd go home, sit in the parlor, and read my clippings, not from newspapers, but from bonds.

As far as I could I've influenced many of my actor friends to do as I did. For a time I made Jessel bring me his weekly earnings and follow me. Many an actor, who was suddenly enmeshed in difficulties through unwise investments or problems of necessity, and who failed to receive attention or proper consideration from his bank, has come to me and I've had his case carefully ironed out at the Manufacturers Trust Company, of whose Advisory Board I am now a member. The outstanding policy of my bank is this paramount stress on the human equation and the effort to study individual cases. Hard and fast rules have limited finance so that only the initiated few can profit by its aid. But by solving each individual problem

and giving every person the benefit of the highest banking knowledge, money which has been the source of so much evil can be turned to the supreme service of good.

It was in the Follies of 1918 that my new business learning came to the aid of our great melody team, Van and Schenck. I did a little banking all my own and banked mostly on my nerve. We were playing in Chicago at the time and Gus Van came into my dressing-room looking worn and wrung out with cares.

"I invested twenty-five hundred in the market," he said, "and I went clean. My wife don't know and I must get the dough back. Think fast, Banjo Eyes!"

The call boy's voice rang like a bugle through the hallway, "Eddie Cantor, specialty!" and I had to hurry down to the stage.

"I've got an idea, Gus!" I exclaimed, and ran down for my cue.

During my specialty I used a line about Green River lime juice drink. I was paid a hundred dollars a week for fifteen weeks to mention this name, and usually worked it in with a gag. I'd pull out a wire which I said had just come from Ziegfeld. "He's heard that I'm advertising Green River lime juice drink," I told the audience, "and warns me not to use the name Green River lime juice drink in the show. So why antagonize him? I won't mention the Green River lime juice drink."

After my act, I met Van and Schenck and told them of my plan. The next day we would go to the Ostenreider Advertising Company, which was paying me a

hundred dollars a week, and suggest a new idea to them. Van and I would write a song about their marvelous beverage and the harmony masters themselves would sing it. It would probably become a popular hit and be sung in every home. It was understood that Van, Schenck, and I split the money for the masterpiece three ways.

We went down to the advertisers with the song all written. It was entitled "Green River" and was simply awful. The refrain ran like this:

> For a drink that's fine without a kick,
> Try Green River,
> It's the only soft drink you should pick.
> Try Green River!

I sang it to the Ostenreider outfit for all I was worth and Van and Schenck harmonized with all they had. "Can't you see, gentlemen?" I added to the force of the melody. "You'll give out copies. It'll sweep the country!"

"We'll give you five thousand dollars for it," agreed the Ostenreiders.

"Ten thousand or nothing!" I cried, walking out in disgust.

As we reached the hall Van grabbed me by the neck. "I'll cripple you!" he growled. "Now we'll get nothing."

The next day I received a call from the firm. "The best we can do is seventy-five hundred."

"Good enough!" I said. Gus got his twenty-five hundred, Schenck got his, and I got mine. I don't know what they did with theirs, although I have a faint inkling.

Throughout the season of the Follies there was a famous dice game, a continuous one that lasted from the beginning to the end of the run of the show, and in it were practically all the high lights of the bill.

I was steadily earning more money, and even my father-in-law was beginning to reconcile himself to my occupation, though he always regretted the gents' furnishing store I could have owned. Still, I knew that one day he would capitulate, and he did. It was while he introduced me to an old friend of his that he said, in awed tones: "I want you shall meet my son-in-law, Eddie Cantor. He makes eight hundred dollars a week." But he felt I was not a real business man. He once saw Harland Dixon in our show and asked me, "What does he get?"

"About seven hundred a week."

"What? For a little dancing? You see, if you was a real business man, you'd take that up and make the seven hundred on the side!"

As money came in, I found myself in constant debt, thanks to Lipsky, who bought up large blocks of stock and made me pay them off with earnings that would otherwise have frittered away in silly extravagances. We started a thrift account for each of the children. There were three now. On the night of June 10, 1919, when the Follies opened in Atlantic City, my third child was born. After two girls you would naturally expect a third girl, and that's what it was. Edna arrived when I was on the road, but a week later, on my return, I was properly introduced to her.

Ever since the day of her birth she and her two sisters have had thrift accounts, putting aside five dollars a week for each. Their savings are invested in bonds, so that they will all have substantial sums when they grow up. I also increased my insurance as my family and income grew.

In 1920, returning from the road, I drove up to 631 East 168th Street, Bronx, where we had been living all this time, and found the flat to let. No one was at home. I called up Dan, surprised and a little alarmed. I could not understand what had happened. Dan tried to reassure me: "It's nothing, Eddie. Ida needed a little rest and went with the children to a place in Mount Vernon." He promised to join me at once.

I had a vague idea about what it might be. "Maybe this time," I thought, "it will be a boy." We drove up to Mount Vernon, and the peaceful suburban atmosphere with rich, embracing trees and lawns of green, aroused a dreamy, gentle feeling in me. I recalled the days at Surprise Lake Camp when I first met nature face to face. We stopped before a beautiful country home with white façades and heaving bosoms of foliage.

"What a lovely place this is!" I exclaimed. I was tired from the long journey east and this seemed the ideal spot to be united with Ida and the children once more.

"This is your home," said Dan.

"You mean—" I was thrilled. Tears came to my eyes.

"The two years are up and you've got what you want."

"You mean it's all mine? My home? My place?"

"Here's the deed to the property. Ida and I picked it. We thought we'd surprise you. Mr. Jonas himself sent up an appraiser from the bank to see that we were getting the right value for our money. And now it's yours. You've earned it."

Chapter XIV

IN THE spring of 1907, a handsome man in the middle thirties, with a rather prominent nose, got off an ocean liner in New York Harbor, and stepped on Manhattan soil flat broke. Three years before he had run a vaudeville show in partnership with Joe Weber at the famous old Weber and Fields' Music Hall on Twenty-ninth Street and Broadway. But he suddenly grew tired of the show business and resolved to quit it for good. He sold his share of the partnership for solid cash, went to Europe, and loafed across the continent for three years until he blew in every dollar he had, and now he was back again, walking up Broadway and wondering how he could get into the show business once more.

For fifteen years he had dabbled in production, and as many times his fortunes had zigzagged up and down. His first show, a musical comedy called "The Red Feather," opened on the night the Lyric Theatre opened in 1892, the year of the World's Fair. It was a success. But he couldn't hold money. He liked the gesture of it. He drifted into many musical and vaudeville enterprises and even produced farces such as "Papa's Wife" and "The Parlor Match." But he never tried to capitalize his successes or organize his finances. He was essentially a brave, bold adventurer of the theater who was only on his mettle when he was on his uppers.

He needed plenty of mettle now. Few remembered him and less cared to, as he strolled penniless and hope-

ful along the bright White Way. Spring puffed its warm breezes in his face, the promise of a hot, arid summer, the worst possible time of the year to launch a show. Nevertheless, he went up to see Mr. A. L. Erlanger, who was already then the little Napoleon of the theatrical world.

He had a soft, persuasive manner combined with the gambler's cool confidence, and even the cautious Mr. Erlanger was inclined to take a chance. He agreed to back him in the production of a small summer show, not exactly vaudeville, nor yet musical comedy, but something different and entirely new in this country—a revue. It would be a modest experiment for a short summer run, and if it served no other purpose, it would at least keep one of the Erlanger theaters open during the torrid months.

Most of the acts were borrowed from burlesque, but there was a novel and refreshing touch of beauty to the show that distinguished it at once and made it an instantaneous success. It was the first revue in America and the first time that pretty, coquettish girls walked off the stage into the audience. It could have played longer, but the theater had already been booked for another show and the revue traveled to Baltimore and Washington, where it played to capacity houses. This was the first Ziegfeld Follies. It cost thirteen thousand eight hundred dollars for costumes and scenery, and thirty-eight hundred dollars a week in salaries and running expenses. One of the last Ziegfeld Follies cost two hundred and seventy thousand

dollars to produce and thirty thousand dollars a week to run.

In the past twenty years, the Ziegfeld Follies have become an American institution of international renown. It is the ultimate ideal of every young American beauty, not barring the movies. The Erlanger Circuit that the first Follies of 1907 traveled is the same circuit it has traveled for twenty years, expanding in scope with the Erlanger interests. During that period, many hundreds of girls from all parts of America have been glorified through the Follies' ranks and attained rich husbands or fame on the stage and screen. Lillian Lorraine, Marion Davies, Justine Johnstone started their careers in the chorus of the Follies. The Follies programs of 1917, '18 and '19, listing the girls of the chorus, almost read like an alphabetical arrangement of the headliners of today.

But more impressive even than the famous beauties of the Follies were its cast of stars, staggering in magnitude when measured by the salaries they now command. In the Follies of 1917, the first that I joined, there were Bert Williams, Fannie Brice, Will Rogers, W. C. Fields, Walter Catlett, and Eddie Cantor. Today such a cast would cost twenty-five thousand dollars a week and, counting the celebrities in the chorus, the salary list would be ten thousand dollars more than the gross receipts.

The greatest musical comedy cast ever assembled in a single show, I believe, was in the Follies of 1919. In that production, Ziegfeld had Eddie Dowling, Bert Williams, Ann Pennington, Marilyn Miller, Van and Schenck,

George LeMaire, Ray and Johnny Dooley, John Steele, Mary Hay and Eddie Cantor. The salary for this cast today would just equal every dollar the box office could take in for the week, not counting the chorus, musicians, or running costs. I reproduce the program of the 1919 Follies as an interesting and unexpected development of the little summer show that Flo Ziegfeld innocently started back in 1907 to tide over hot weather.

When Will Rogers first went with Ziegfeld he got a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week for the season. In his last appearance with the Follies, Will received thirty-five hundred a week for fifty-two weeks in the year. During his third season with Ziegfeld, Will was earning only three hundred and fifty a week, and he came to Flo, saying, "When I left Oklahoma I promised my wife and children that some day I'd make four hundred a week, and if I could ever make that the dream of my life would be fulfilled." Ziggy promptly fulfilled his dream, but the next year Will asked for six hundred.

"What's the idea?" said Flo. "I thought your wife and children were perfectly satisfied with four hundred a week."

"They are," replied Will. "But since then I've gotten another child and he's kicking."

In those days Ziegfeld concentrated his whole year exclusively on the Follies and built it slowly, consummately. He conceived it, directed it, and worked upon it with a staff of able lieutenants until it was architecturally perfect. Gene Buck wrote the lyrics, Dave Stamper com-

posed the tunes, Ned Wayburn staged the dances, and Ziegfeld introduced Urban with a new conception of scenic art. Urban has since designed the new Ziegfeld Theatre.

When I say that the Follies of 1919 was the greatest of its kind, I am not judging merely by box-office receipts. For in that respect the Follies of 1921 was unique. It ran for two seasons in New York. But the 1919 show was one of those ideal organizations of entertainment that bespoke the last word in stage generalship and the most perfect harmony of actors and material. Everyone in the cast clicked. Each specialty, no matter what its character, was performed by the acknowledged master of that field.

First of all, there were four big song hits where two would have been ample. "Tulip Time" and "Mandy" by Buck and Stamper; "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody" by Irving Berlin; and "My Baby's Arms" by McCarthy and Tierney, who afterward wrote the music and lyrics for "Kid Boots" and "Rio Rita." Eddie Dowling, Ray and Johnny Dooley, played the Bullfight Scene. John Steele and Delysle Alda sang the leading sentimental numbers. Bert Williams and George LeMaire, the best heavy straight in the business, played the Sharp-Shooting Scene. Marilyn Miller, Ann Pennington, and Mary Hay, who later married Richard Barthelmess, held up the dancing end of the show. I played the Osteopath Scene with LeMaire, and also introduced the popular song, "You'd Be Surprised." Then we had Van and Schenck for melody

rhythms. If you were a hit in a show like that you were a hit.

I must have made an impression on at least one person, for nine years later he not only remembered the song I sang, but the special slurs and peculiar inflections I had used in its delivery. I met him in a rather embarrassing moment. He was a motorcycle cop and interrupted me at Queens Plaza just as I was about to establish a new record with my car for the trip from Great Neck to New York.

"Get over!" He waved me sullenly to one side and dismounted. "Gimme your license!" I took my license out of a pocket in the car and he read it with a frown. Then he looked up at me suspiciously.

"Are you Eddie Cantor?"

I don't know why I hesitated. At best I am no Adolphe Menjou, but with a two days' growth of stubble and my coat collar turned up I pass for a genuine freight-car resident, and the feeling that I looked grimy and unkempt must have made me self-conscious.

"You got any other identification?" growled New York's finest. I took out a watch that Ziegfeld had inscribed to me. The cop's eyebrows lifted and his eyes fairly popped. He looked at my new Cadillac, then at the inlaid timepiece, then at my hairy face, and thought here was a prize catch. I was not only a speeder, but probably a robber, too. He already had visions of elevation to the detective force. But he tried a last clue.

"You say you're Eddie Cantor," he snapped. "Well, do you know a song, 'You'd Be Surprised'?"

"Yeh."

"Well, sing it!"

And there in the rain, with my collar turned up and two days' growth of beard, I sang a verse and chorus with the special slurs and peculiar inflections I had used nine years ago; and the cop seemed to listen for just those touches that characterized my delivery. His eyes were screwed in an expression of stern intensity, but gradually they relaxed and a broad grin spread over his face.

"You're Eddie Cantor, all right!" he cried, patting me on the back. "Now run along and take care of yourself!"

In the Follies of 1918 I roomed with Frank Carter, who afterward married Marilyn Miller. For a long time I played as important a rôle back-stage in this romance of the wings as on the stage in blackface. Marilyn's parents strongly opposed the match, and, having had my own experience with Ida's parents, I became a willing and handy Mr. Fixit for the lovelorn couple. I arranged little tête-à-têtes for them at restaurants, slipped notes from one to the other under the nose of Marilyn's watchful parents, and the love-match went through as per schedule.

One day, while we were playing in Philadelphia, Frank Carter bought a magnificent high-powered automobile for his dancing star. He drove it himself to the theater hoping to surprise her with it. The car was struck in a collision and he was killed. For a time it seemed that poor Marilyn would not survive the shock of this tragedy. They had only recently been married and were extremely fond of each other. The grand suite Marilyn and her mother

occupied, was now a lonely place with haunting memories, and Marilyn sat all day in a daze of anguish, lapsing from spasms of sobs to blank, morbid moods.

After each performance of the Follies, Van and Schenck and I would go up to her rooms in the hotel and give a special little performance for her, to lift her out of her melancholy and make her forget. Our own hearts were heavy, and we often had lumps in our throats while trying to entertain, but we clowned it through and it was a touching sight to see her smile. Marilyn was as brave a trooper as ever marched the boards, and a little while later she was twinkling gracefully across the stage again. But behind the dancing star that smiled at the audience so charmingly was the little heartbroken widow who wanted to cry.

It was in this Follies, too, that I faced a crisis of my own. I had made the resolve that old Black-face must die. In a moment of emergency I had put on his dark mask and he had helped me to success. Now the audience knew only this cork-smeared face, while I stood hidden behind it wondering what would happen if the blacking came off. I feared that in this lay the seed of a greater tragedy than any I had yet experienced, and I had made my mind up long ago to leave tragedy to the Booths and Mansfields. I was not going to be a slave to a piece of burnt cork for the rest of my acting days. For the Follies of 1918 I prepared a scene in white-face. My agent, Max Hart, asked Ziegfeld to let me try it, and he agreed, but in an evasive way.

I rehearsed my skit with Frank Carter, but on the

opening night Ziegfeld refused to let the scene go on, having there was no room for it in the show. The fact was, he doubted my chances in white-face and feared to risk the change. But this change meant more than my job to me. It meant my future and freedom from the pale of the black label. The second night I gave him an ultimatum, "Either the scene is in or I am out—altogether." Ziegfeld reluctantly agreed to give the act a trial. This marked my first appearance on the musical-comedy stage in my own face, and, good or bad as that face might be, it was the first time that I felt revealed to the audience and in personal contact with it.

In the scene I played a ludicrous weakling applying for admission to the aviation corps, and I received a grueling physical examination at the hands of Frank Carter. He whacked and banged me, clapped me together and pulled me apart like an accordion, and did everything but twine me around a spool. It was the first physical comedy scene I ever played and turned out to be the biggest hit of the show. In the next Follies I followed it up with the Osteopath Scene, which transplanted the idea of bodily punishment to a new and more fertile locale. A scene of physical comedy has since become a standard element in my repertory of fun.

It seems that audiences love to see somebody knocked and battered about to the point of insensibility so long as they feel he isn't really getting hurt. But if they suspect the punishment has passed the point of fun, they suddenly stop laughing and even show resentment. This happens

occ· night at a performance of "Kid Boots," when the burly doctor who mangled me in a variation of the old Osteopath Scene, did it so well that afterward I had to go to a real osteopath to be treated.

In my last Follies, ten years after the Follies of 1918, the aviation scene was new again, and we considered using it as a physical comedy skit. But by a curious freak, in trying to adapt it to the recent developments in the news, the physical punishment took the form of a mental examination, and the laugh effects I once produced by being thrown all over the stage, I now got by sitting quietly in a chair and answering questions.

I played the part of a Jewish aviator from Newark and named my plane "Mosquito—The Spirit of New Jersey." Major Brown, in charge of the flyers at Mitchell Field, said he would like to quiz me. It is interesting to observe how, by stringing our gags together from line to line, we made the quiz take the place of a physical scene.

The major scanned me contemptuously, "You don't look like an aviator!"

"You don't look like a major."

"Sit down!" he growled. "You were in the army? Did you get a commission?"

"No, a straight salary."

"Have you ever flown before?"

"I had flu during the war."

"Flown! Flown!"

But I was adamant. "Flu! Flu!"

"You must say, 'I have flown.' You can't say, 'I have flew.'"

"Are you telling me? I was sick in bed with it! I ought to know what I had." The major changed the subject.

"Can you name some of the principal aviators of nineteen twenty-seven?"

"Well—Chamberlin, Levine, Ruth Elder, Levine, Commander Byrd, Levine——"

"Who else?"

"Did I mention Levine?"

The major eyed me suspiciously. "What is your name, anyway?"

"Ginsberg."

"Your first name?"

"Gregory."

"Gregory Ginsberg! Is that your right name?"

"My right name is Levey."

"Why did you change it?"

"Well, I was in the South, around the Mississippi, during the floods, and I read headlines in the papers that they were going to blow up all the *levees*."

The officer curled his lip in disdain.

"I have a few formal questions to ask you. Married?"

"No."

"Children?"

"Major!"

He ignored my shocked expression and continued:

"Where were you born?"

"In Chicago. I'll show you the scars."

"Never mind. How do you sleep?"

"Like that." I clasped my hands as a cheek-rest.

"I mean, do you sleep well? Are you disturbed at night?"

"Yes. I'm disturbed terribly."

"What disturbs you?"

"My brother Morris. I sleep with him."

"How does he sleep?"

"Like this." I put my feet in the major's lap and he shoved them off in a rage.

"How long can a man live without brains!" he exclaimed, beside himself.

"I don't know. How old are you?"

When the examination was finally completed, I was to hop off like Lindbergh, with one bottle of water and five sandwiches, but, unlike Lindbergh, I intended to eat on the way, and called off the whole flight when I discovered that all the five sandwiches were ham.

I recall this skit so minutely because in its earliest essence it was my first scene in white-face. And it must be said for Ziegfeld that despite his hesitation he had the showmanship to let me experiment. For in theatrical production precedent is not a safe guide, and the sheer spirit of gamble is often two-thirds of the victory. In this regard Ziegfeld is, without exception, the biggest sport in the business. With a wave of the hand he has often dis-

carded a scene in the Follies that cost fifteen to twenty thousand dollars, where another producer would hesitate and sacrifice the rest of the show to preserve a dull but expensive set.

On the other hand, Flo has many peculiarities that are often bewildering and embarrassing to his actors. He has a phenomenal passion for sending wires, and I have tipped off my friends that, should Ziegfeld happen to pass away, they could sell Western Union short and become millionaires overnight. Ziggy has often stood in back of the orchestra during a rehearsal, and instead of calling out to the actors and telling them his criticism or suggestion, he would go out into the lobby and send them telegrams back-stage.

He once sent me a twelve-page wire and added, "Will write you in detail tomorrow." On one occasion at least I hit upon a temporary cure for this telegraphic flood. I received an enormous telegram from him while playing with "Kid Boots" in Chicago. He made certain suggestions, saying he believed a certain song should go out and certain lines should be changed, while certain actors were slipping up and certain scenes needed watching; and what did I think of this, and didn't I think that was better, and wasn't the other thing as good as the first? The whole was such a bewildering tangle that I knew here would begin the world's longest correspondence in telegraphy, so I simply replied, "Yes." I thought this would cap the volcano, but I promptly received another telegram twice

as long as the first, saying: "What do you mean, 'Yes'? Do you mean 'Yes' you will take out the song, or 'Yes' you will put in the lines, or 'Yes' you will fix that scene, or 'Yes' you have talked to those actors?" And so on for pages. To this I answered, "No." That ended the bombardment.

But it seems there was often a subtle purpose in this onslaught of yellow messages. Toward the end of the season, as the contracts with actors began to expire, they would get the most irritating and bewildering reams of wires, scolding and criticizing them, and those who had planned to ask for a raise got worried about their jobs and were glad to sign again on the old terms. But once this method didn't work. Ziggy shot me a couple of stinging messages, and instead of blushing with shame, I flushed with anger and came back with a sudden resignation. He quickly wired me that he was only kidding me, but it was one time I couldn't see the joke. He had to tack on a thousand dollars a week extra as heart balm for the rest of the season, and then the humor of the messages dawned on me. Those were two expensive wires that cost him twenty thousand dollars.

But it is all in keeping with his flourish in the grand manner, which is not affected, but comes natural to him. He lives like a potentate, and his musical-comedy settings reflect his innermost quality of the far-flung and majestic. He has an uncanny sense of lighting effects, color combinations, costume harmonies, and scenic backgrounds. He pays the highest salaries to artists and is the greatest man-

ager for girls that America has ever had. As far as actors are concerned, a man to Ziggy means nothing, but girls!—he has made many girls and girls have made him, and on that principle is based his chivalry, theatrical display, and success.

Chapter XV

ON THE opening night of the 1917 Follies three figures stood back-stage of the New Amsterdam Theatre, looking through the wings while waiting for their cue. One of them was a tall, lean Westerner from Claremore, Oklahoma who chewed gum with the slow, measured rhythm of eternity; the second was a man of medium height, puffy-faced, big-nosed, a juggler with sly, peepy eyes who had come out of Philadelphia; and the third was a thin, nervous chap, younger than the other two and smaller, with dancing, popping eyes and hands that moved all around him. He had arrived from the depths of New York's East Side.

They were three different types of comics who had risen from widely different schools of acting and the most diverse schools of life. The first, Will Rogers, had come upon his stage career by accident. As a youth he went down to South America to teach the gauchos to swing a lasso. When he came there he found that their ropes were too long and their motions were all twisted, but they could lasso like nobody's business. There was no one to teach, so in disgust he embarked on a cattle boat for Africa. When he landed in the dark country he met another man of the open spaces, Texas Jack, who was running a small-time rodeo show, and Will joined the company as a rope-twirler. That was Rogers' first appearance on the stage—a cowboy in Africa.

Eddie Cantor and Clara Bow, Who Appeared Together in the Picture Version of "Kid Boots"

Fannie Brice and Eddie Cantor in Los Angeles

The second, W. C. Fields, had a totally different development. At the age of eleven he left his home in Philadelphia to take his first job as an actor at Plymouth Park, a little Coney Island near Morristown, Pa. His wages were five dollars a week, out of which he paid an agent's commission of a dollar and a half weekly. From there he went to play at a drinking-garden in Atlantic City for ten dollars a week and "cakes" which meant food, but it was neither cakes nor food, just beans. There was no charge for entertainment, and the proprietors of this fancy saloon did all their profiteering on five cents a beer, pretzels and Fields thrown in. His first real break came in burlesque, where he got eighteen dollars a week when he got it. At one time he was willing to settle all his back-pay claims for fifty cents to ransom his laundry. "If I had fifty cents," growled the burlesque manager, "I'd start a number two company!" This line has since become a catch-phrase in the profession.

While Bill Fields has achieved fame mainly as a juggler and comic pantomimist, many people have the mistaken idea that he never opened his mouth on the stage until four years ago, when he starred in his first big musical-comedy vehicle, "Poppy." At that time the critics united in applauding him as the man who had found his voice, and hailed Bill's larynx as if he had just had it installed. The truth is, Bill had been talking on the stage for over twenty years. He had a speaking part as far back as 1905, when he played in his first musical show, "The Ham Tree," with McIntyre and Heath. But

the story of his protracted silence sounded like such good publicity that Bill never took the trouble to correct the critics.

If anything, Bill Fields talked so much on the stage that at least once his talk got him into a serious mess. He was playing at the Winter Garden in Berlin and had translated his monologue into stilted German, using old text-book words instead of colloquial idioms, so that he found himself saying such awkward things as, "I'll break your throat" and "I bit my language." What was worse, some of his innocent wise cracks became, in translation, highly blasphemous and even profane, and instead of the snickers and giggles he expected, he got hisses and boos. In France they laughed at the wrong places, and in Italy he was threatened with stilettos. After that, Bill made his European tours without words, relying solely on pantomime, but back in the States he always talked. As an actor he played the longest circuit around the world twice. It was on his first trip that he met Will Rogers in Africa.

These were two of the comedians who stood in the wings of the New Amsterdam Theatre. I was the third. It was our first night together in the Follies. We had drifted here from strange places through many hardships, and tonight we would be taking turns on the same boards, in front of the same footlights. We felt as if from the very first we had battled every inch of the way together. There was never a thought of rivalry or envy. Though each would try his hardest to excel, he hoped his

colleagues would achieve the same distinction. Frank Carter, one of the handsome straight men of the show, passed us as we stood there. He must have thought we were queer, curiously contrasted figures, and he smiled. "As I live!" he exclaimed, jovially. "The Three Musketeers!"

Probably at no time in theatrical history did three comedians in the same show work so harmoniously together. In a business where a laugh to a comedian is life itself and he usually begrudges every chuckle another comic gets, the Three Musketeers of the Follies were ready to lay down their laughs for one another. Will Rogers would watch my act from the wings or W. C. Fields' skit and offer changes in the lines or situations that invariably improved the original material. We tried to do the same for him whenever possible.

One day, Will, Bill and I made a covenant among us and went further back than Dumas' musketeers for our idea of friendship. In fact, we went all the way back to Omar Khayyám, the original old soak of Persia. According to Fields, Omar had formed an alliance with two other tent-makers which provided that whatever might befall, any one of the three could always come to any one of the others and share his tent, his loaf of bread, and his jug of wine. Fields might have had an ulterior motive in telling us this story. Maybe he intended to retire on us. Nevertheless, we gave the pledge. Strangely enough, we have never needed to call on one

another. To this day each of us has managed to do a fair business in his own tent.

Only once did all three of us play in a single sketch, and it was one of the worst sketches the Follies ever had. It was Ziegfeld's idea to put his three musketeers in an opening skit and start the show with a bang. It was not only a bang, but a blow-out. Fields was grotesquely made up as the director of a patent office, and many inventors and cranks forced their pet ideas upon him. Will Rogers and I were among the patentees. Each night we changed our inventions and always sprang something new on Fields, who was unprepared for the surprise. He had to keep right on edge to make sure the laugh was not on him.

As neither Will Rogers nor I had to use make-up for this scene, we would rush in from the street the last minute and patent anything we could lay our hands on. It was the first comedy scene in the show, and if Will did not arrive on time I ran on for him, too, and he often served me the same way. Only Fields had to be on hand very early every night, make up carefully, and go down with a heavy heart to his worthless patent office.

But he bided his time and turned a laugh on Rogers in which I was an unwitting accomplice. One night during the war Bill arrived in Rogers' dressing-room with a new joke he had just heard. The Germans had unloosed Big Bertha that shelled Paris at a range of eighty-five miles, but the American wits failed to be impressed. "Aw, that's nothin'," they said. "Uncle Sam's now got

a gun that can shoot everybody in Berlin right from Staten Island, and all those it don't kill it takes prisoners!" Will Rogers thought it was such a funny line that he decided to work it in that night as the finish to his monologue.

Hearing this, Bill promptly came to my dressing-room. He knew my act went on ahead of Rogers' and said, "Eddie, I heard a great one today that you could use in your specialty." He told me the same joke, but didn't tell me that Rogers was planning to use it. I thought it was nice of him to give me the gag. During my specialty I put it over and it brought a big laugh. But while I was on the stage, Fields kept Rogers busy up in his room and Will suspected nothing when he went on for his cue. He did his act as usual, and then for a smashing finish he told the gag about the gun.

"Well, how did it go?" asked Fields, eagerly, as Rogers came off, looking rather sullen.

"Strange," muttered Will. "It sounded like a funny line to me, but nobody laughed except the musicians."

When I played in the Porter Scene with Bert Williams, I came on as a college youth just back from the halls of culture with two empty satchels, but one night I nearly broke my neck trying to trip lightly on to the stage with them. They were as heavy as light cannons. Fields had secretly filled the bags with telephone directories and bricks. To reciprocate this courtesy, I invited him the following week-end for a game of golf. Bill takes his golf very seriously and can play very well. I

led him to believe that he was in for a hard match, and he came all primed, canceling a real game for this one. When I met him on the links I took off my coat and stood in my pyjamas and bed slippers. Bill laughed, but he didn't enjoy the game after that. He felt foolish following me around in my night-clothes for nine holes. As for me, the way I play golf, I should always wear pyjamas and sleep through the game.

Practical jokes were a part of the theater, and the comedy we started on the stage overlapped into life. No member of the show escaped being involved in some prank, and once or twice there were almost serious consequences. While we were in Atlantic City with the 1919 Follies, Irving Berlin and I stopped at the Marlborough Blenheim Hotel. Berlin got a rush message to return to New York, and he asked Harry Akst, his musical secretary, to pack his bags for him the same afternoon. I volunteered to help Harry, and took a few pictures off the wall, which I tucked into Berlin's satchels. In New York, Berlin's valet unpacked the luggage, and Irving never knew that he had taken along these strange souvenirs from the city by the sea. But he soon received a letter from the hotel sarcastically observing that they thought he was a gentleman and asking why he marched off with pictures from their walls and why he didn't take the walls too!

Berlin was amazed. He grew highly insulted and came back with a snappy denial. Moreover, he demanded an apology or he would have a lunacy commission in-

vestigate the management. Other letters followed that consumed a lot of time and temper on both sides, but I don't think the dispute has ever been settled. This is the first light shed on the mystery. The pictures are probably still in Berlin's attic and undoubtedly he has never seen them.

Another jest that took a more earnest turn than we expected was one that Fields and I framed around Will Rogers. If he reads it here, this will be the first time he learns the facts and discovers the culprits. Will would often tell us of the dearest friend he had in the world, a pal of his early days back in Claremore, Oklahoma, called Clay McGonigle. At first we thought the man was a fictitious character, the name sounded so pat; but Will told us so many interesting tales about good old Clay and himself that gradually the feeling came upon us to conjure up Clay and one fine day bring him on to New York. Unknowingly, Will Rogers himself showed us the way.

It was war time and we sat in Will's dressing-room listening to his stories about the old days and his inseparable crony, Clay McGonigle. "Haven't seen him in years," said Will, "but I've a hunch that I know just where he is right now. He's out in France with the doughboys, holding the front-line trenches. He must have gone over the day war was declared—he was that adventurous!"

This was our cue. We'd have McGonigle going over the top. But we had to fashion our material skillfully

to fool a shrewd one like Rogers. Luckily, his valet confided to us that Rogers had a nickname which McGonigle had given him and which nobody else had ever heard. When Will and Clay rode the freight trains together, Rogers would often pass a night in a car full of chickens and emerge in the morning covered with feathers, like the last of the Mohicans. Clay grinned at him, exclaiming, "Look at Chickenchief!" and the nickname stuck. With this priceless secret in our possession we were ready to frame a letter that Rogers would have to believe. Bill wrote it out in a clumsy hand:

DEAR CHICKENCHIEF,

Will be out front tonight watching your show. Will see you for the last time. Tomorrow I'm on my way to France. Whoopee!

Your old pal,
CLAY MCGONIGLE.

We relayed this note to Will Rogers, and soon after he came down to my dressing-room with a twinkle of excitement in his eyes. Fields, who dressed in the next room, joined us casually.

"Boys," cried Rogers, with an emotional tremor in his tone, "you'll never guess who's out in that audience tonight!"

"Who?"

"My old pal, Clay McGonigle!"

"No!"

"Yes," said Will. "He left a message for me with the

doorman. Funny, we just talked about him yesterday. Gee! It'll be great to see him again!"

It was a pity that Clay had forgotten to specify where he would be sitting in the audience, but Will Rogers felt sure he could locate him. "I could pick him out of a thousand!"

"Will Rogers!" shouted the call boy. Will snatched a piece of gum he had plastered under my make-up shelf, stuck it into his mouth, and ran down for his cue. He would keep the same four pieces of gum going all season and stick them in strategic places where he could get one at a moment's notice. Gum was as much a prop as his ropes, and he never chewed it off-stage.

Fields and I were consumed with curiosity to know how our joke would develop, and we went down to watch Will's act. He was twirling his loops with more energy than usual and shooting all his gags at Clay. There was no audience for him that night but Clay. Every line he uttered began with Clay and finished with McGonigle. "Remember the old days, Clay?" he exclaimed, hopping into his circling ropes. "What would the folks back home say, old pal, if they knew you were sitting here tonight!" It was a total blank to the audience. But what did Will care? Somewhere out there was his oldest pal and dearest friend, and he was going to give him a good time before he sailed for France. "What do you say, Clay? I'll meet you after the show!" Fields and I had to hold each other not to collapse.

After his act, Rogers told us he wouldn't show up in

the finale that night. "I've got to get out early and stand in the lobby to catch Clay as he leaves the theater. See you tomorrow, boys."

He stood in the lobby watching the crowds go out, certain that he could spot Clay among thousands. But there was no Clay. He waited till remnants of the audience straggled out and the last man left. Then he came back, thinking Clay might have called at the stage door. He grew impatient, swore, and finally called up the William Penn Hotel as the most probable place where his friend might be stopping. But they had never heard of McGonigle. He tried every hotel and club he could think of, and hunted through the night for his pal. It had ceased to be a joke. It was a lesson in devoted friendship that Fields and I never forgot.

For a long time after that Rogers often wondered what had happened to Clay that night. Now he'll know.

But the practical joke is a ruthless weapon with a double edge and I've often had it turned on me. Van and Schenck once took me to a Childs restaurant in St. Louis after the show. While I went to get a table they lingered behind to tell the manager and waitress that I had just returned from a sanitarium, not entirely cured, and that I was still slightly deranged. The manager and waitress looked queerly at me and treated me with caution. Gus Van further confided to them that my whole mental disorder was due to drinking too much milk and that under no circumstances must I get near a glass of it. They knew I was dieting at the time and

that milk was my main item of diet. Suspecting nothing of all this, I asked for milk and was surprised to hear the waitress suggest that I take cocoa or tea instead.

"Why can't I have milk?" I asked, getting irritated.

"We haven't any," said the waitress, glibly.

"But I see a lot of people at other tables drink it," I protested, angrily. "How is that?"

"They—they brought it along with them—when—when they came in," explained the waitress, becoming alarmed. This seemed very peculiar to me and I insisted on speaking to the manager. I made such a strong and lucid appeal to him that he almost relented, but Van and Schenck motioned to him as if mortally afraid. "No! No milk! He'll calm down!" Van whispered to him. "But if you give him milk, he'll bust up the joint!" I finally had to drink cocoa.

But sometimes, without anybody planning or anticipating it, a practical joke would be born of itself. We were playing in Cincinnati and Fannie Brice, who was stopping at the Sinton Hotel, acted mother to the troupe. Fannie is the type who, in her spare moments, will sew hats for poor chorus girls, mend stockings, and even wash light underwear. She is a natural-born mother and W. C. Fields, Will Rogers, Don Barclay, and I became her children by adoption.

One night we visited her at the hotel to take her along for a bite after the show, but she insisted on feeding us right there.

"I'll save you boys some money," she said, but in real-

ity she prided herself on her cooking skill and wanted us to sample her master dish. We consented and waited an hour and a half while she busied herself in her improvised kitchenette, preparing the famous spaghetti *à la* Fannie with tomato sauce and all the fixings. Luscious flavors of food tickled our nostrils, and our hunger grew steadily keener. At last Fannie beamed triumphantly as she set the grand steaming platter before us.

We had to admit it was worth waiting for, and began to eat heartily. But before the second mouthful an afflicted expression came over our faces. At first I thought my sense of taste was at fault, but all the others sensed the same fault. It seemed that Fannie's maid had filled the jar of powdered cheese with Lux and Fannie had sprinkled the spaghetti full of it. Our mouths were foaming with soap. We had to go out to eat, after all, and Fannie laughed all the way. But there was a disturbing hysterical note in that laugh.

The Ziegfeld actors formed a happy household in those years. A spirit of genuine fellowship and helpfulness prevailed in the Follies of '17, '18 and '19 that has rarely been equaled by any other troupe. The older members of the cast took it to be their pleasant duty to give the younger ones the benefit of their stage experience. Each actor felt like a guardian over the others and took pride in their success. There was no doubt that such bonds of friendship could stand any test of endurance. And soon came the biggest test of all. In 1919, while the Follies played in New York, an alarm was sounded. For the

first time in its history the theatrical profession was called out on strike.

There had been grave abuses in the producing business. Actors would rehearse for ten and twelve weeks without pay; then the show might play a week or two, and they'd have to start rehearsing in a new piece all over again. On the other hand, if the show was a success a manager could play as many extra holidays as he pleased without compensating the actor for the extra performances. On holidays like Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays, the actor played gratis. In fact, whenever the manager saw a flag waving he declared a holiday or an extra matinée, and there were producers who ordered special performances in honor of their own birthdays. Out West, where Sunday shows were permitted, actors played seven nights a week as well as two matinées, and received no extras. Chorus girls particularly were hard hit. They never received a cent during months of such long rehearsals that made the recent dance marathon look like a short afternoon. Besides, when their show finally opened they got as low as twenty-five dollars a week, and out of that had to pay for their stockings and shoes.

It must be said for Ziegfeld that he never deducted the cost for stockings, and his general wage scale for girls was much higher, but the strike was not directed against individuals. As long as he remained apart from the Producing Managers' Association he was unaffected by the strike. The first day of the walkout it was rumored that he had joined the managers' group and I quit. I

went to see the Scandals that evening, but Ziegfeld located me there and called me back an hour later with the assurance that he hadn't joined. I promptly returned to the show, and in the second act did my first-act bit. Five days later, however, I discovered that Ziegfeld was a member of the Producing Managers' Association.

That night I took my stand on Forty-first Street opposite the stage door of the New Amsterdam Theater, and as the actors of the Follies arrived I whistled to them. The first to appear were Van and Schenck. They heard the siren call and turned their heads.

"What's up, Eddie?"

"Strike."

Without a word they crossed over to my side of the street and stuck. As the next actors arrived, all three of us whistled. They halted at the signal and turned. They were Johnny and Ray Dooley.

"What's the matter?"

"Strike."

In a short while the whole cast was lined up on our side of the block and we marched to the headquarters of Actors' Equity. Frank Gilmore, who headed the organization, was delighted to receive us. This was the one big show that had held out. After we joined Equity, success seemed certain. At the time, Bill Fields was playing up on the roof. As the Midnight Frolics was considered part of the vaudeville field, its actors were not included in the strike. But Bill heard the clarion call of the Musketeers and left the show to join us.

None of the Ziegfeld stars had anything to gain by the strike. But neither had Frank Bacon, who after long years of struggle had just hit his stride in "Lightnin'." Yet he quit readily on behalf of his colleagues, even if it meant that he and Mrs. Bacon would have to take up once more the hunger-racking struggle of a lifetime. There was no question of personal profit. It was a spirited movement to elevate the profession as a whole, and the more successful actors made sacrifices freely that their less fortunate associates should gain a measure of protection.

The Actors' Equity Association opened a benefit performance week at the Lexington Opera House, where the greatest vaudeville bill of all time was given on behalf of the cause. The opening day, before the show began, all the actors marched down Broadway, each company bearing its banner, and I carried the colors of the Ziegfeld Follies. It was the first war art ever waged for bread, and it was an inspiring spectacle to see. At the Lexington Opera House prominent actors sold tickets, while other celebrities of the stage acted as ushers. The rest played on the bill, which included such names as Ethel Barrymore, her brother Lionel, Frank Tinney, John Charles Thomas, Eddie Foy, Ed Wynn, W. C. Fields, Frank Bacon, Brandon Tynan, and the Follies cast.

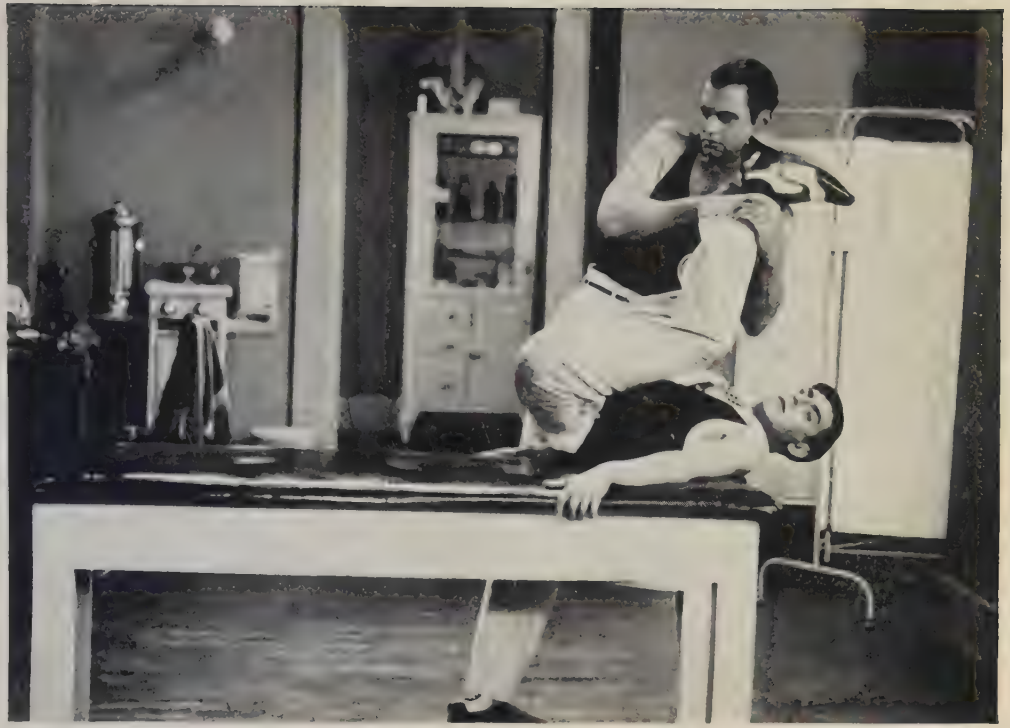
Never were performances given with such enthusiasm and zest. Each actor thrilled with purpose. The comedians were never funnier, the tragedians never wrung such tears. Most of the men dressed together in a grand

democracy. They shared one another's make-up, outfits, gave lavishly of all they had. We played twelve performances in six days and were eager to do more. We made bonfires of our emotions and swept our audiences in a blaze of excitement. It was the greatest week in our lives.

Ed Wynn was taken out of the show by a court order. According to his contract with the Shuberts, they had the power to enjoin him. A comparatively new actor, James Barton, just risen from burlesque, took his place. The week at the Lexington Opera House made Jimmy Barton, and soon after, the Shuberts signed him, too.

Some theaters, only partly handicapped by the strike, refused to shut down, and we formed committees to try and keep the public from attending their shows. Bill Fields, Ernest Truex, Frank Fay, and I drove along in a car which we intentionally stalled in front of one of these theaters. We pretended to be fixing the car and clowned around until the prospective ticket-purchasers were attracted by us. We entertained them so well on the street corner that they willingly missed the show inside. The policemen were in sympathy with us, so was the public, and we invariably captured the day for Equity.

The actors won. Most of the abuses were eradicated. Chorus girls were provided with a better wage. No actor would have to rehearse more than four weeks without pay. There would be extras for holidays. While managers retained a free hand in casting, they could no longer try out an actor and make him rehearse for several weeks, only



EDDIE IN THE OSTEOPATH SCENE—"KID BOOTS"

Eddie Cantor and Daniel Lipsky, His Financial Adviser

to fire him before the show opened. They would have to decide within the first ten days whether he was fit for the part. If they retained him after that he was entitled to the regular two weeks' notice with pay. Irresponsible producers would be required to post a surety. This was as valuable a safeguard to legitimate managers as to the actors. It helped to clear the show business of undesirables. Equity has since developed to be as great a boon to producers as to its own members. It is now recognized by both sides as a monument to the growing dignity and stability of the American theater.

After the victory we all returned to our old posts, but things were no longer the same. Ziegfeld had promised to star me in his next show at a greatly increased salary. Instead, he stalled and avoided the subject. The memory of the strike was still fresh in his mind. I asked for my release and got it. If not for the strike, I probably would have played opposite Marilyn Miller in "Sally." By joining my less fortunate colleagues to aid their cause I had definitely surrendered this opportunity, which, as the figures afterward proved, would have yielded me nearly four hundred thousand dollars. But I had sincerely enjoyed the sacrifice and felt more than repaid for my share in the triumph of Equity.

The Three Musketeers were now separated. Will Rogers had accepted a movie contract. Bill Fields drifted back to the Frolics, and I was alone with no immediate prospect in view.

Chapter XVI

In 1920, during the season after the strike, the Shuberts were preparing a revue that had all the elements of entertainment but comedy. They lacked a comedian, and as I lacked a management, we soon came to terms.

The Shubert organization operated like a huge industrial plant. The two brothers, J. J. and Lee, had both begun their theatrical careers as ushers in a theater at Syracuse, and the same accurate, methodical system by which they never directed a customer to the wrong seat, they now applied on a larger scale to the efficient conduct of their vast enterprises.

Lee took charge of all the real-estate interests of the firm, while J. J. concerned himself exclusively with production. He perfected his machinery of production to such a degree that he often managed to turn out ten and fifteen shows a year. He is unquestionably one of the preëminent showmen of our time, and has such a canny sense of the theater that he has frequently, by drastic and lightning changes on dress-rehearsal night, transformed a flop production into a hit. He recognized Al Jolson in the raw, and when I made my stage début as a youngster with Bedini and Arthur at Hammerstein's, J. J. had already made Jolson a Broadway star.

Before the new Shubert revue took shape, J. J. asked me to play several weeks in the "Broadway Brevities," a Shubert production at the Winter Garden. In this show I introduced a scene at the dentist's where I got many

laughs and the reason I recall it is because I've never got any laughs at a dentist's since.

After four weeks of rehearsal the Shubert revue went down to Philadelphia for its opening trial. As I approached the theater I was dazzled by a mighty blaze of electric lights and beheld my name for the first time in the place of honor above the title of the show. Perhaps nobody else caught the full significance of what the bright bulbs were saying, but I stood and stared until they almost blinded me. The legend read:

EDDIE CANTOR
IN
THE MIDNIGHT ROUNDERS

Instead of thrilling me, the sight of this display made me weak and a sinking fear tugged at my heart. This night would decide whether I could be a star.

"Listen, J. J.," I said, "why don't you hold off the fireworks till after I've made good?"

"Don't be foolish, Eddie," he replied, impatiently. "You'll be a knockout!"

It was a night of high fever and rapid pulse. The "Midnight Rounders" whirled round at a dizzy pace. To add to the speed and confusion of this first wild night, J. J. ran back-stage every few minutes and shouted orders. "Kill the next scene," he cried. "Reverse the dance numbers and put in the specialty after that. The next four songs are out. Call Eddie!" It was long before

my cue and I ran down from my dressing-room in a bathrobe, half made up and excited.

"What's the matter, J. J.? Is the show off?"

"Not yet. Just go on and stall," he said, "while we switch the next scene."

"What do you mean, 'stall'?"

"Do anything. Only keep 'em laughing!"

I went on in my bathrobe and told the audience the truth. "Jake Shubert sent me out to stall while they change the show around. It may take weeks." I was wholly unprepared, but the job was to make them laugh, and I did.

A few minutes after I returned to my dressing-room, J. J. called me again.

"What's the matter now?"

"Go on and stall."

This time I went on in my undershirt and did another impromptu monologue. When that was over I went back to my room, sighing with relief. I began to get ready for my regular turn, when the call boy rushed in, breathless.

"Mr. Shubert wants you right away!"

"Say, what is this—a gag?"

I was caught completely unawares and ran down without my trousers.

"What's the matter, J. J.?"

"Go on and stall."

"What! Without my pants! At least give me a hat!" I put on a derby to feel dressed, and in this ridiculous

outfit I made another unexpected appearance. The three stalling episodes proved so successful that we kept them permanently in the show.

The opening night lasted till twelve. The revue received a stirring ovation. After the show Shubert came back-stage. The whole cast assembled to listen to any comments or criticisms he might want to make. He turned to them, putting his arm around my shoulders. "Ladies and gentlemen of the cast," he said, "I want to introduce to you Broadway's newest star—Eddie Cantor."

"The Midnight Rounders" was my first starring vehicle. After the opening, I had prepared a little party for my friends to celebrate the occasion. There were about twenty of them who had accompanied me from New York, some with their wives, and they all arrived back-stage in full dress, hungrily waiting for me to lead them to the sumptuous banquet they expected. "You're a hit," they said, "and we're entitled to a feast in proportion to the triumph!" I led them to a Childs restaurant, where I had reserved tables in advance. The banquet consisted of a baked apple and cream for each guest.

"What's the idea?" they protested.

"Well," I explained, "this morning, before the show, I thought to myself, 'Which would my friends rather have—a big hit or a big banquet?'"

"A big hit, of course!" they cried, enthusiastically.

"That's what I thought."

They sat down in their evening dress and stiff shirt

fronts and ate the apples with the elaborate formality of a feast.

The full responsibility of my new position grew upon me. It was no longer like playing on a Ziegfeld bill studded with big names. If I got sick in the Follies, I might be missed, but the show could still go on. Now the burden of the whole revue was pivoted on me and if I failed to appear, the doors of the theater would be locked. The welfare of the entire company was in my keeping and I didn't permit even illness to interfere. There were times when I danced and sang through a dozen numbers and encores unable to take a deep breath, because one side of my chest was tightly strapped to dull the pain of pleurisy. I staggered off the stage exhausted, almost unconscious, and a doctor worked steadily over me to get me ready for the next cue. But the show went on.

It was in "The Midnight Rounders" that I first played a scene which proved to be one of the most popular hits of my career. It was called "Joe's Blue Front" second-hand clothing store, and started a vogue of clothes shops in musical shows. The original one, however, is still considered by many as unsurpassed.

I played the assistant to the late Joe Opp, who was the tailor. Our first and only customer, Lou Hearn, came in for a fit, and before we got through with him he took one. My first sales blunder was to touch the material of the suit he wore, thinking he intended to buy it.

"Ah, that's the best suit in the house," I exclaimed, admiringly.

"That's his own!" scowled the boss.

The customer then explained that he wanted a suit with a belt in the back.

"A belt in the back?" By steadily repeating this phrase and lifting my arm as if to strike him every time his back was turned, the audience laughed more and more in anticipation of the moment when I'd haul off and give him the belt he wanted. After I finally got him to compromise on a hunting suit, I showed him a Prince Albert cutaway.

"Is that a hunting suit?" the customer sneered.

"Sure. We been hunting for the pants for two years."

He was hard to satisfy, so I persuaded him to get a nice second-hand suit made to order. He got on the model stand and I took his length right down to the ground, including the height of the stand. Hearn and I then laid him out flat, as if to measure him for a coffin. I sang the numbers off the tape and Hearn sang after me as he wrote them down.

"*Sho-oulders, sixty-two and a ha-alf . . .*" I chanted in the manner of hymns. "*Wai-aist, ninetee-een . . . Slee-eeves, sixty-eight!*"

We proceeded in this singsong way as if we were praying, and the customer who watched us with a puzzled air finally joined in with, "*Swee-eet Adeli-ine!*"

After the fitting, I again tried to sell him a suit. This time a blue one, but he wanted it with stripes. My fingers were covered with white chalk and by running them along

the coat I spread stripes over him. "They fit you. You were born to be in stripes!"

"I'd rather have a two-button sack suit," he reconsidered.

"Why, certainly!" As the coat I gave him had three buttons, I tore one off. "How's that?" He still hesitated.

"You look like a different man in that suit," I urged. "Your own wife wouldn't know you. Go out in the light and see for yourself." He went out while I replaced the other clothes on hangers. When he returned I approached him as if he were a new customer "Yessir. What can I do for you, sir?" He started in surprise.

"Why, it's me," he cried. I stared at him blankly.

"Me! Lou Hearn! The fellow who was just in here to try on a suit!"

"You!" I was amazed. "You see? Even I didn't recognize you!" That clinched the sale.

At the wind-up of the skit I had so muddled and confused the customer that he was trying on a boy's sailor suit, though he still longed wistfully for something with a belt in the back. He finally ran out of the store with nothing on at all but his red flannel underwear, leaving his own suit behind.

"Joe's Blue Front" was the only scene I ever played in two consecutive shows. After running for two whole seasons in "The Midnight Rounders" we transplanted it bodily to "Make It Snappy," where it carried on with equal success.

I had a physical comedy scene in "The Midnight

Rounders" that took the form of an examination for life insurance at the offices of the Disreputable Insurance Company. The doctor in charge asked me, "Do you think you can pass?"

"Give me a pair of dice and I'll show you."

Under pressure, I admitted that I had already been turned down by three companies—The New York, New Haven, and Hartford. The examiner then inquired sternly, "Do you drink anything?"

"Anything," was the answer.

These and other gag lines were freely borrowed by vaudeville teams and used in cities on the road before I got there. When I arrived and used the same lines it gave the impression that I had borrowed from them.

"The Midnight Rounders" played for seventy weeks along the Shubert Circuit. In the company were Nan Halperin, Lou Hearn, Jane Green, and Harry Kelly. It was probably the most charitable troupe of boys and girls I ever played with, and on afternoons that we had no matinées we would hunt up some hospital or sanitarium and entertain the patients.

On September 16, 1921, during the road tour of the show, I received word that a fourth child was born to me. Ida and I being already the proud parents of three daughters, I confess that this once we vaguely expected something different. And it was. It looked different, it cried more at night, it took the bottle oftener. It was entirely different from the other girls in every respect but one. It too was a girl. So we called her Marilyn.

While traveling with "The Midnight Rounders" I often gathered bits of personal experience and worked them into my monologues. The best known of these is a line my daughter Marjorie gave me when she was six. Due to the road tour, my absences from home were long and frequent, but as soon as we played in a neighboring city I hurried home to see the new baby. I rang the door bell, and Marjorie answered. She looked rather strangely at me and ran into the hall, exclaiming: "Mamma! That man is here again!"

Another bit in my specialty grew out of a totally different experience. I was stopping at the Hotel Wolverine in Detroit, and Fronde, the hotel proprietor, urged me to drive over with him and another friend to the races at Windsor, Canada. It was the first time I saw horses that were not hitched to wagons, and I suggested, as a lark, that we place a bet on a horse called Bumpity-Bumps, because its name reminded me of the good old horse-cars. We chipped in ten dollars apiece, thirty in all, but while we chatted in the club-house it became too late to bet. Fronde wanted to run out and bet the money at the pari-mutuel machines, but I dissuaded him. "After all, I hate to see even thirty dollars for the last time!" He bowed to my wisdom. A few minutes later the race was on and Bumpity-Bumps won at a hundred and ninety-seven dollars for two. We could have made about a thousand dollars each, but we didn't. We were true sportsmen, and took the thing so calmly and quietly that none of us talked all the way home.

That night I told the story in my specialty, and added a sequel. "Considering what we might have won on Bumpity-Bumps," I said, "we decided to play the next race. We bet a horse ten to one and he came in a quarter to six. He seemed to be awfully stuck up and wouldn't run with the others. Then we bet a mudder, but he loved mud so much, he stopped to eat it. Still, we'd have been even for the day if we had played on credit!"

A third experience that told well from the stage was one I had coming in from Pittsburgh. I sat behind two men in the train who happened to be talking about me. One of them was saying: "I saw Eddie Cantor in 'The Midnight Rounders.' You think he's such a nice fellow off the stage?"

"Nice fellow!" said the other with a trace of a sneer. "Why, he's a relative of mine!" I was taken by surprise and tried to get a full view of this new-found kin, but I felt sure I had never seen him before. "Sure!" he continued, glibly, obviously trying to impress his listener. "Whenever Eddie is in Pittsburgh he comes to our house for a good old Friday-night supper, and how he loves that stuffed fish and noodle soup!" He went on to describe intimate details about me and my family that were all wrong and I felt like interrupting to correct him. At last his boastful nerve began to irritate me and I leaned over to him. "You know Eddie Cantor?" I inquired, as if interested.

"Why, sure!" he said with brazen self-assurance.

"You say he's been to your house lately?"

"Only last night!"

"Is that so?" It was news to me. "Well, I happen to be a pretty good friend of his myself," I said, "and I'll bet you you wouldn't know Eddie Cantor if you saw him."

I knew the fellow was lying, but I knew he had gone too far to back down.

"It's a go," he said. "I'll bet you ten dollars." He must have felt the possibility of meeting me pretty remote.

"And you'd know him if you saw him?"

"I sure would! He even told me he's leaving for New York tonight and if he's on this train he'd look me up!"

What a bluffer! The papers had carried an item about our leaving for New York and he probably had seen girls of the chorus board the train. But he had talked himself right into the trap.

"Well, if he's on this train, who is he?"

"You are," he said, beginning to laugh. The two of them had framed their little chat just to attract my attention, and it had succeeded perfectly.

After "The Midnight Rounders" the Shuberts starred me in a new revue the title for which J. J. picked up from an elevator boy who was rushing the crowd into his car with the whip line, "Come on, folks, make it snappy!" J. J. came up to the office with a grin on his face, "Boys, I just got the name for our next Cantor show. We'll call it, 'Make It Snappy!'"

It was a snappy show in every sense. We snapped right through it from start to finish, and after a season's run at top speed it snapped altogether. The outstanding innovation of our revue was a harem scene in which I burlesqued Rudolph Valentino as a sheik. After an eloquent description of me as the mighty Sheik of the Sahara, mounted on his fiery Arabian steed that galloped across the desert in a cloud of flame, horses' hoofs were heard, and I came on the stage riding a bicycle.

I had a eunuch managing my business, and the women punched time-clocks as they entered the harem tents. But I was not destined to enjoy this Mormon life for long. A rival sheik from another Turkish coffee-house was hot on my trail and came upon the scene, his face menacing and his head bowed by the weight of his mustache. Fortunately, before he lifted me on the point of his saber he noticed a locket around my neck which looked pawnable. He opened it and beheld the picture of a woman. Then began a most touching scene of recognition between a long-lost father and son.

"My wife!" he cried, pocketing the locket.

"My mother—Sophie Tucker!" I cried, trying to get it back.

"My child, Sarsaparilla!"

"Pop!" And we clinched.

At the close of the harem scene a troupe of skilled Arab acrobats swarmed all over the stage in fantastic somersaults and pinwheels. One day, two of this troupe

come to my dressing-room to tell me that the Shuberts had decided to cut down on expenses and let the acrobat caravan go. These two Arabs happened to be nice Irish boys who wanted to work and knew how.

"We're fired, Mr. Cantor," they told me, "but we noticed you've been so good to everybody in the cast that we thought we'd ask your advice. Maybe you could recommend us to some booking office."

They had been getting thirty dollars a week each. Now they wouldn't even get that. I felt a deep sympathy for these boys, still young and facing all the hardships I had known so well. "I've got an idea how to use you in this show," I said. "Wait for me after the matinée." Late that afternoon I made them up as old men in the mock disguise of country yokels with wrinkles and whiskers, and I dressed them in old farm clothes that Lou Hearn dug out of his wardrobe. I then fixed up a little music for their act and put them out in a number by themselves. When these two rickety old men with gray beards and hobbly steps suddenly went into their neck-breaking leaps and somersaults they proved to be a riot and stopped the show. Later on they got three hundred dollars a week from Ziegfeld and are earning double that today. The Kelo Brothers are now a headline act on Broadway.

While passing one of the dressing-rooms I often stopped to listen to two young girls of the chorus who sat in their room harmonizing popular songs in a unique and charm-

ing way. One day I told them that I thought they had great possibilities. I took them to music publishers and selected a little repertoire for them. When their singing act was ready I fixed a spot in the revue to try it out. They proved an instant hit. This was the beginning of the rise of the McCarthy Sisters, who have since become a leading attraction of the "Scandals."

It has given me great satisfaction, during my years on the stage, to spy out promising talent and do all I could to encourage it. In 1918, the parents of a young man came to me asking that I do something for their boy. He had been coming around to my dressing-room for a long time and an intimacy had grown up between us that ripened into friendship. He gradually confided to me that he hoped some day to reach the footlights, and I promised to help him. I gave him my own monologue, worked over a little program of songs with him, and made him try out the act in an outlying playhouse of Chicago. His first effort was a little crude but encouraging, and we worked together for some time until he found himself. He got seventy-five dollars a week at the start, began to write his own stuff, and made steady headway. Today, Jack Osterman is one of the big lights in the younger musical-comedy world and commands a salary of twelve hundred and fifty dollars a week. I got a real thrill one night when I watched him on Broadway and he introduced me to the audience as the fellow who put him on the stage.

While "Make It Snappy" did not measure up to the success of "The Midnight Rounders," it managed to attract capacity crowds in all houses on the road. I remember sitting one night in the box office of the Apollo Theatre in Chicago and the house was completely sold out. I always had four front seats reserved for the use of my friends, but it was getting late and I did not expect to take advantage of them. A little nearsighted man with furry eyebrows came over to the window, noticed the sign, and looked rather crestfallen. He and his wife, both tiny and squinting, could never hope to see the show, even if there were two seats at the rear end of the orchestra. He was about to walk away when I called to him, "I'll let you have two of my seats." He appeared very pleased and appreciative. Before he went in he said, "Some day I hope I can do something for you," and handed me his card. It read, "A. Hutchins, Undertaker and Embalmer."

At the close of "Make It Snappy" the Shuberts asked me to renew my contract, but I had grown tired of revues. I wanted a musical show with a story. I felt that was the logical step upward. Opposite the Apollo Theater in St. Louis, Ziegfeld's "Sally" was playing. Ziegfeld was in Palm Beach at the time. One of the newspapers observed in its theatrical column that "Eddie Cantor at $3.30 a seat is better entertainment value than Marilyn Miller and Leon Errol at $4.40." I was anxious to have Ziggy see this. I reprinted this comment in a full-page

advertisement that I took in *Variety* and Ziggy saw it. A few days later he telephoned to me from Palm Beach. I told him the principle consideration for my return would be to play in a musical show with a story. He agreed to star me in my first musical comedy.

Chapter XVII

THE birth of a good musical comedy is like the old alchemist's efforts to produce gold. He would throw a multitude of elements into his caldron, copper and lead, iron and sand, acids and stones, churn them into a molten mass with rods, bellows, and flames, and in the end he either had a pretty mixture that was nothing at all, or, if gold did appear, he never could tell which of the countless things he had tried caused it, or how to repeat the process exactly. That is show business, and particularly musical comedy.

It is true, we are guided by some simple basic rules, but the factors that go into the construction of the musical play are so numerous and often accidental that even those who watch its development most closely and know every step of the way are always surprised at the finished product. Sometimes, not agreeably. And it isn't necessarily one thing that matters, like a song or a setting or a situation. It is that intangible something called "clicking." If a show doesn't "click" it's not there. Sometimes even the story doesn't count. I have seen a manuscript on the strength of which a manager launched the most elaborate production, but when he finally presented it, not a single line or idea of the original manuscript remained and the show was a hit.

"Kid Boots," which has been rated by many as the best all-round show I have played in, and one of the most successful musical comedies of the American stage,

started vaguely, gropingly, and with not even an idea. All we had was a desire—my desire to act and Ziggy's desire to stall. With Ziggy, stalling is lifted to the dignity of an art. If he says, "See me Thursday," you can't tell if it's this month or next year. It seemed ages as the weeks creaked by and nothing happened. We were in search of an author with an idea for a real musical show, and it looked as if the authors had conspired to keep in hiding.

One day, Joe McCarthy, the lyric-writer, of the musical partnership of McCarthy and Tierney, who had written the score for "Irene," came around with a suggestion for a play about golf. The novelty of locale is one of the hardest problems in musical-show business, but with this popular game as a background there seemed to be some promise of a new atmosphere. McCarthy had an idea about a bootlegging caddie-master who practically ran an exclusive golf club through his liquor business and intrigues. Ziegfeld and I liked the idea from the start, and the problem now was to get some one to write the book.

We wanted some fresh ideas injected into musical comedy and were anxious to avoid the stiffly patterned, conventional plot. Ziegfeld called in a writer who had never done a musical show before. He had just come into some prominence through a successful comedy he had written, called, "Six Cylinder Love," that was produced by Al Lewis in association with Sam H. Harris. Before this, William Anthony McGuire was comparatively unknown to the theater.

He had written a play at the age of sixteen, but wisely kept it a secret. In fact, he wrote eleven more before he finally plucked up the courage to submit one. No playwright of recent years has had such a difficult beginning as Bill McGuire, or such a spectacular rise. Because of a frail and sickly childhood he quit public school in the fifth grade and never entered a hall of learning again until he was nineteen, when he returned to Notre Dame for a two-year academic course. The first play he tried to sell a manager was called, "The Soldier and The Cardinal." This manuscript was so stubbornly and frequently rejected that Bill had it printed in book form at his own expense in order to preserve for posterity the most rejected manuscript in history. It was dangerous to smile to young McGuire in those days, for if you did he immediately autographed a copy of *The Soldier and The Cardinal* and presented it to you. He never would get another friendly smile after that.

But it was destined that this much-maligned and despised play should one day, in an altered version, be a Ziegfeld hit and establish Bill McGuire as one of the best book-writers of musical comedy. It happened like this. When Bill went back to Notre Dame to polish up his spelling he picked up a book called, *The Three Musketeers* and found, to his amazement, that it told almost the identical story he had written in *The Soldier and The Cardinal*. Bill modestly concluded that Dumas had plagiarized the whole idea from him. Lucky for Dumas that he wasn't alive. But Bill's hour was drawing near.

Eddie as the Mailman in "Special Delivery"

Building the Follies of 1927—Eddie Cantor, Florenz Ziegfeld, Sammy Lee, and Irving Berlin at the Piano

He was beginning to be admitted to managers' offices. He wrote a play called "The Walls of Wall Street," which was acted at a benefit and distinguished society figures took part in the production. Frank Keenan was impressed by the young man's promise and engaged him to write a play. Frank Keenan was one of the greatest character actors of our stage, so it couldn't have been his fault that Bill's play, "The Heights," sank to the depths in a week. On the other hand, Bill claims it's the greatest play he ever wrote.

He had to leave New York after that and try Chicago, where they didn't know him. There he wrote "The Divorce Question," which ran one year and had five road companies, but never got to Broadway. He then came out for race suicide in "The Good Bad Woman," but when that didn't work, he urged more population in "It's A Boy." At last "Six Cylinder Love" arrived and made the grade in high. Hit followed hit. He wrote and produced a melodrama, "Twelve Miles Out," and last year he wrote two of Ziegfeld's biggest successes, "Rosalie" and "The Three Musketeers." The dream to have his first play produced was realized in this curious way, for in adapting the famous French novel for the stage, McGuire incorporated many lines and scenes from his virgin effort, "The Soldier and The Cardinal."

But when Bill McGuire undertook to write the book for "Kid Boots" he had attained none of his present distinction and we had mainly our faith to go by. After many discussions of the golf idea, Ziegfeld suggested that

McGuire, McCarthy, and I get together and plan out the story. New delays set in. McCarthy couldn't meet us Wednesday and Bill couldn't make it Thursday. But Friday was fine for everybody.

"Then it's definitely agreed," I said, "that we meet at the Lambs' Club, Friday at one o'clock."

"O. K."

Ziggy seemed glad that he had got the three of us off his hands and lapsed into pleasant dreams, probably thinking we'd never go through with it. In the meantime he had me tied to a contract which prevented me from accepting other offers. Days flapped their wings and flew away while I idled and waited. At last came Friday. I made sure to eat at twelve, to be at the Lambs' Club promptly at one. McCarthy arrived at one-fifteen and McGuire didn't show up at all. He didn't even phone. He was beginning to display the temperament of a real playwright. The next day we learned that he had been obliged to go out of town, and that week was wasted.

We finally arranged a meeting for the following Wednesday, wiring to Bill in Atlantic City, and he agreed. We met at McCarthy's house in Pelham. Joe served drinks and we liked them. After the fourth drink none of us knew what we had come up there for. So that was done. We stopped over and the next day got down to business. Weeks and weeks had frittered away and something actual had to be accomplished, so we decided on the title, "Kid Boots," which we had had in the first

place. We also decided on the subject. It was to be a play about golf.

McGuire promised that in four or five days he'd have a rough draft ready of act one. Ten days passed. No rough draft and no McGuire. McCarthy and Tierney and I became uneasy and went to Ziggy. Ziggy seemed surprised at our complaints and remarked coolly, "I thought the play was all finished by this time." Then we told him what we thought of McGuire in a series of well-chosen adjectives, and he sent for Bill. Bill, we suspected, was working on another play, not on "Kid Boots."

"Give me a few more days," he urged, after we all had pounced upon him. "I've got a new idea."

We left Ziggy, but we didn't leave McGuire. We took him to the Lambs' Club and he recited some lines he had thought up for the show which we believed were great. He might have been working on it, after all. He certainly showed ability and our confidence was restored. But we were a little afraid of his knowledge of musical-comedy technique, as this was his first effort in that line, so we suggested that some one else be called in to collaborate with him. McGuire readily consented to split his royalties with some one capable of aiding him in technical construction. Another week passed and Otto Harbach, master technician, was engaged.

We now started migrations to Harbach's home. Joe, Bill, Otto, and I held a convention there and everybody agreed that we'd have a great show, but as yet there wasn't a line on paper to prove it. I finally had a private

little session with myself in my own house and decided that I'd have to start doing a little work myself if I was ever going to star in "Kid Boots."

I submitted a couple of unfinished scenes, suggestions in the raw that started McGuire and Harbach thinking. One of them was the idea of a comedy golf lesson. As caddie-master I could teach on the side, and have some big husky woman as my pupil. The other idea was a physical-comedy scene. We would disguise my old osteopath act and set it in the ladies' locker-room of the club. To make my torture more intense, Ziggy suggested the introduction of an electric chair like the one he had seen at Dr. Khonstamm's where he went for electrical treatments. McCarthy and Tierney got at the piano and started to fake tunes and lines for the entire musical opening of the show, and it sounded fine. Things were beginning in a vague, chaotic way to shape themselves.

A week later, with Harbach who is an indefatigable worker laying the framework, McGuire brought it in the first draft of act one, embodying the locker-room scene and the golf-lesson. While he and Otto furbished up the act, the problem of casting arose. We didn't have the second act until we were almost ready to open.

We came to Mr. Ziegfeld armed with the script of act one, and now it was his turn to stall. "What!" he exclaimed. "Ready so soon? You really going to have a show? What's the idea of rushing me?" We knew he needed a week to stretch and get used to the thought of a production. We let him stretch while McGuire

and Harbach continued to go over the act with a fine comb and polish it to a bright finish.

I brought in several lines to them every day, lines that I had used before and were sure-fire. Both playwrights looked bored at my literary efforts, and spurned the lines because they were mere jokes and had nothing to do with the play. I tried to show them how they could be fitted in and finally most of them were fitted in, and they eventually turned out to be among the biggest laughs in the show.

Bill and Otto read Ziggy the first act and I tried to play it for him as they read. I lay on the floor, I kicked my legs, putted golf balls on his desk, hopped onto his lap, and pinched his cheek, and Ziggy was ready to cast. McGuire knew the types he wanted and insisted on them. His ability as a casting and stage director is equal to and perhaps greater than his skill as a writer.

Harbach, on the other hand, is a graduate engineer at dramatic construction. He knows just when the heroine should enter, and at what hour the hero should be broken-hearted, and exactly when the climax should crash down on the house. He has a sense of timing and sequence which is essential to the successful development of a musical story.

McGuire gave his mental picture of the characters and suggested most of the actors suited for the rôles. Ziegfeld had one cry, "Too much money." But the cast on paper looked good to us and we held out, wearing down Ziggy with arguments, cajolery, and firmness until he

consented. The cast—Mary Eaton, Jobina Howland, Harry Fender, Harland Dixon, Marie Callahan, and a few days later, Ethelind Terry and Beth Berri were added. We were confident that we had a great musical-comedy cast. There never was a greater.

When the question of engaging the different actors came up, Mary Eaton's lawyer insisted that she be co-starred with me. Ziegfeld refused, and I objected also. After all, Mary had only been one of the many players in the last Follies and was recently regarded merely as a dancer in the "Royal Vagabond," while I had three seasons of starring to my credit and was considered a drawing card in New York and on the road. There was no personal question involved. I simply considered it poor business to surrender so lightly the one thing I had surmounted so many difficulties to achieve. I persuaded Mary's father and her lawyer that she should be featured in equally large type. Thus, instead of

EDDIE CANTOR and MARY EATON
in
"KID BOOTS"

it was made to read,

EDDIE CANTOR
in
"KID BOOTS"
with
MARY EATON

Actors hold out for such things.

Mary consented. Our association in the show was of the pleasantest and she afterward appeared in her first starring vehicle, "The Five O'Clock Girl" where she achieved, in proper time, the honor she had so coveted.

McCarthy and Tierney had all the numbers ready for act one. We read the first act to the entire cast, the parts were distributed, and rehearsals begun at a hall on Seventieth Street. I took my part home and upset many a rehearsal by bringing in new suggestions. Edward Royce, who staged the book and dances, willingly paused to receive my ideas and skilfully interpolated them. He was an invaluable man for directing stage action and conceiving dance interpretations. He worked for many hours on Mary Eaton's numbers and ballets.

One of my suggestions opened the way for a new headliner. We had engaged sixteen colored boys for a caddie number, but I felt that these boys would be working against great odds, and to get any recognition would have to be much better than they were. Instead, I suggested a single dancing specialty. I had in mind a young man who was little known but whose dancing appealed to me, and I brought Horton Spur into the show. His appearance in "Kid Boots" established his reputation.

While the rehearsals progressed, McGuire brought in an additional scene for act one that developed into one of the funniest situations ever written for musical comedy. There was a golf match in the show that had the hand of a girl at stake. I attempted to eliminate one of the golfers with a hammer, so that the hero could replace

him in the contest. In working up to the hammer blow a situation of comedy suspense was created that produced five minutes of continuous laughter. The situation grew and became funnier the longer I played it.

We were going into the third week of rehearsal when it suddenly occurred to me that there was no second act. I hurried to Ziegfeld, who was occupied with the opening of his new Follies. He sent out an alarm for the delinquent playwrights, and more sessions followed. A week later the tail end of the show began to emerge. The final scene of the second act was to be set in the cocoanut grove, where a ball would be held and I would appear in black-face to do my specialty.

I felt the need for a band in this spot to enrich the scene and accompany my songs, but Ziegfeld had already protested strongly against the increasing expense of the production, and it looked almost impossible to get a band that would be both good and cheap. Fannie Brice, knowing our problem, told Ziegfeld and me of a new band she had heard out West that to her mind would one day be a sensation.

The unique feature of this band was its capacity for playing jazz time in a subdued and dulcet style, getting its effects through subtleties rather than noise. She had first heard it in a hotel at Portland, Oregon, and the last she knew it was playing somewhere along the Orpheum Circuit. I was intensely interested and induced Ziegfeld to wire the leader of this band, a Mr. George Olsen.

Frances Upton and Eddie in the Taxicab Scene, Follies of 1927

Eddie Training for the Kitchen Scene in "Whoopee"

George Olsen had begun his musical career as a drummer, not out of necessity, but as a hobby, for he was always in comfortable circumstances and made good money from a trucking and storage business that he owned jointly with his brother. But he preferred the hobby to his business and organized a small jazz band that he conducted in the main hotel of Portland, his home town. Fannie Brice and other Broadway stars would stop there on their Western tours and urge George to break through the narrow walls of the little hotel and reach out to the rest of the world. He finally migrated with his modest band to California for a trial performance, and on his first appearance in vaudeville scored an immediate success.

Olsen and his band acquired a local reputation, but its scope was limited. When the Ziegfeld offer reached him out of a clear sky, he realized that this was his big chance. The money that Ziegfeld offered him was no object, or at least such a small object that Olsen couldn't see it. But he accepted a contract for eight hundred dollars a week for the whole band, and lost money every week, making up the deficit out of his own pocket.

When "Kid Boots" opened in Detroit it was such a triumph that both Ziegfeld and Ed Royce thought we could get along without the band and save the eight hundred. But I felt it would be a big mistake and insisted that Olsen and his orchestra accompany me in my specialty. A warm friendship grew up between George and me, and on several occasions I championed his cause with Ziegfeld, who for some reason was anxious to make life

for the bandmaster particularly hard. At least once I was obliged to tell Ziggy, "If George doesn't play I don't play."

During that year Olsen and his orchestra appeared with me at fifty-eight benefits for charity. One Sunday we played on four different programs, and George with his men rushed through the streets, carrying their heavy, shiny instruments from theater to theater. The wholehearted spirit in which he volunteered his services and the splendid way his band performed won fame for the Olsen orchestra overnight.

Last year his net personal earnings were five thousand dollars a week. He and his band played in "Good News" and at the Club Richman, while two other Olsen orchestras played at Miami and Havana. Endowed with a pleasing personality and educated at the University of Michigan, he lends that dignity and refinement to jazz interpretation that have made him a society favorite. Today Olsen's is the biggest jazz orchestra of the Victor Company and the sale of his records is second to none.

While the finishing touches were being put to "Kid Boots" I attended the opening night of the 1923 Follies. Tickets were selling at twenty-two dollars a seat, and when I found where my seat was I came equipped with a wrench, a hammer, and screwdriver and began to bang and loosen the seat just before the overture started. An usher hastened down the aisle and tried to stop me. "Let me alone," I cried. "I paid twenty-two dollars for my seat and I'm going to take it home!" The audi-

ence laughed and so did Ziegfeld. The critics observed that it was one of the best bits of the show that night.

In the same Follies I wrote a sketch for Fannie Brice, called "Snappy Stories of History." It represented a girl seated on a park bench, reading a magazine of *risqué* stories. A fellow would come out and tell her that in his book of history there were far more snappy tales. Then the curtains parted, revealing Fannie Brice in her versions of Queen Isabella, Queen Elizabeth, and Pocahontas. One night as I visited the show I noticed that the man with the book failed to appear on his cue. Fannie stood on the stage in bewilderment, not knowing what to do next. I snatched a program from one of the ushers, walked on the stage out of the audience, and played the man's part.

The time was fast approaching for the opening of "Kid Boots." McGuire revised the second act, improving it substantially. We needed a strong comedy scene toward the finish of this act, and he brought in the famous "Nineteenth Hole," which was one of the high spots of the show. Everything was ready now but the scenery and costumes. I wondered what could be delaying these last and essential elements of the production. I went to see Ziegfeld and stir him to action, but he received me rather indifferently.

"I want to talk to you, Eddie," he said, as if to prepare me for something unpleasant.

"What is it, Flo?" I sensed that something was wrong.

There was a minute of silence.

"I don't think we ought to go through with this show," he said at last.

I was stunned. My lips suddenly parched and I couldn't find my voice. But when I found it, the words gushed in torrents.

"Listen, Flo, after all this tough work and rehearsing five weeks and a cast like that and ——" He cut me short.

"I've made my mind up."

"But why?"

"I think it's a sure flop!"

Chapter XVIII

WHILE probably the greatest producer of hits, Ziegfeld is no optimist. He knows that a show may be sure-fire at rehearsals and look like amateur night when it opens. For that reason, as a production becomes more and more promising, he grows more pessimistic. Only recently, while three of his most sensational triumphs were in the making, he telegraphed McGuire, saying: "Why did I ever undertake so many shows! I am in the worst predicament of my life. I've got three flops on my hands." He was referring to "Show Boat," "Rosalie," and "The Three Musketeers." McGuire was deeply moved by Ziggy's complaint and replied, "Please accept my condolences in this your darkest hour of success."

I therefore knew that Ziegfeld's gloom over "Kid Boots" was a great sign. The problem was how to get him to order the scenery and costumes. I went to his office and reënacted the whole play before him from start to finish. I don't believe I ever gave a better performance of "Kid Boots" than that day. I sang the different numbers and choruses and played all the different parts in the piece, for I have always made it a point, in every show I have acted, to acquire a working knowledge of all the rôles, and have frequently jumped in to play an absent actor's part in an emergency. Ziegfeld's hopes were restored. He ordered the costumes and scenery.

Shortly after that, the whole cast went down to the

New Amsterdam Theatre to hear the entire musical score and see the new sets. Then came the dress rehearsal. Ziegfeld removed his coat, and when Ziegfeld removes his coat the serious part of show business begins. He has often worked through a dress rehearsal for a span of twenty hours, starting at two in the afternoon and still going strong the next morning. The theater is empty and a solemn air pervades the darkened orchestra where only the glow of a lighted cigar betrays his presence. The stage brightens up as for a regular performance and the play begins. No one must sit around in the theater or make a noise, for now comes his part, the rôle Ziegfeld plays in the show.

Numbers are done over and over again and dances are restaged at his request. Spots for certain specialties are switched and musical cues adjusted. He complains that the finale is too drawn out and the scene in one, in front of the drop, does not give enough time for putting up the next set. He hardly interferes with the dialogue or comedy scenes, for he has no fixed ideas as to what the audience will like and waits for the public reaction on the road to draw his conclusions. If the costumes don't harmonize with a particular scene according to his notion, they are discarded as so much cloth, and that's that. His main concern is ensemble effects and the sweeping impression of the whole.

He begins to give instructions to the electricians for the lighting of every scene and most of it sounds like deep Greek.

"Blue foots up on dimmer at start of overture," he says, "and white and amber foots up on dimmer at the end. Next scene, all lamps flood until finish, then dim down to blue and white one-quarter up and palm curtains open."

In this fashion are born those color moods which lend the final aura of splendor to the already lavish production.

"Kid Boots" opened in Detroit, December 3, 1923. It clicked from the first and ran as smoothly as a performance played after six months on Broadway. On the opening night I created a dozen new laughs by impromptu lines and they remained in the show. The audience received the production as a sensational triumph. Ziegfeld and Royce were so elated with my performance that they came to my dressing-room and kissed me. The tension of the first night, always severe with me, broke me down completely this time, and I cried like a child, the tears rolling down my face and ruining my make-up.

We played four weeks on the road, traveling to Cincinnati, Washington, and Pittsburgh, and opened in New York on New-Year's Eve. By that time some of the dancing costumes looked a little smudged to Ziegfeld and he ordered new dresses for several numbers. It was an additional item of eighteen thousand dollars, but he wanted the whole production to be crystal sparkling for opening night. In that respect his gallant gestures to his public are unique.

We opened at the Earl Carroll Theatre, and a little

extemporaneous curtain speech I made that night was kept in the show for three years.

"Kid Boots" contained every type of comedy for which I was best suited. The pattern of its comic scenes and their sequence were skillfully designed and have rarely been excelled. The shades of fun varied from light gags and wise-cracks to human situations, and from great physical hokum to delightful nonsense. My very first entrance was planted for a laugh. I rushed in, jumping about as if to work off an attack of fits.

"What's the matter, Boots?" asked one of the guests, trying to calm me. "What are you jumping around for?"

"Let me alone, will you!" I exclaimed, excitedly. "I just bought a second-hand watch. If I don't do this, it won't go."

In a musical comedy where spoken scenes are limited of necessity, the fact that I was the comedian of the show had to be established quickly, not by announcing it in the program, but by the first two minutes of dialogue. To accomplish this I wove in a half-dozen jokes around the fact that I was the caddie-master.

Thus, when I addressed the caddies, they fell down at the mere force of my authority.

"Get up," I said, sternly. "I suppose you know I'm the caddie-master around here!"

"Yes, ma'am," they replied.

"Yes, *ma'am?*" I was taken aback.

"No, ma'am."

"No, *ma'am?*" I understood, tore off the red necktie I was wearing, and put it in my hip pocket. "Don't let this thing fool you. I'm a pretty tough guy, I am. When I have waffles for breakfast, I throw away the waffles and eat the irons!"

They stared at me and slunk away, but I called them back.

"How often have I told you guys there's been complaints about golf balls being missing. Now I don't mind you sneaking in a ball now and then, but remember, a golf ball is never lost till it stops rolling. Remember, honesty is the best policy. You've either got to be honest or I get half."

This kind of a scene had the double purpose of getting laughs and introducing my character. This was swiftly followed by a human situation in which I tried to comfort Tom Sterling, the forlorn lover. Against the serious background of his hopeless love for Polly, played by Mary Eaton, my comedy proved twice as effective.

"I've got troubles, Boots," he sighed, bitterly.

"You've got troubles? Lookit. I lost my salary shooting crap, my girl swallowed her engagement ring and I owe two hundred dollars on it. I've got an accident policy and I can't get hurt—and you've got troubles!"

I tried to show him that if there were harmony between him and Polly all their troubles would vanish.

"Do you know my idea of perfect harmony? I'd like to see a baseball game between the Ku-Klux Klan and the Knights of Columbus, with a negro umpire, for the bene-

fit of the Jewish War Relief. I tell you, Tom, everything happens for the best—for some one. Say, if no one got the worst of it, no one could get the best of it."

"Boots, I'm in love."

"In love—that's different. In love everybody gets the worst of it. But, Tom, how can you be crazy about a girl like Polly? You must remember she's a swell girl from a big family, while you're only a handsome bozo. Forget it, Tom!"

"I can't."

"Don't say you can't. Look at me. When I was a kid I promised myself that when I'd be twenty-five I'd have a Rolls-Royce. Well, yesterday I was twenty-six and I put five dollars down on a Ford!"

This line brought one of the biggest laughs in the show. Yet under the guise of comedy we were carrying on the story of the play, which is the ideal method for light entertainment.

After planting the fact that I used crooked golf balls loaded with a little lead on one side so that my pupils could never master the art of putting, the well-known golf-lesson scene began. Jobyna Howland, who had made her mark in the "Gold Diggers," played an eccentric doctor who, in spite of her robust physique, was learning golf to build up. She was proud to let me know that she had played pretty well the day before.

"What did you go around in?" I asked with a professional air.

"A blue skirt and a brown sweater."

"No, no! I don't mean your attire. I mean the score—the number. What number did you make it in?"

"Oh! Seventy-one."

"Seventy-one! Why, that's phenomenal!" I exclaimed. "And the second hole?"

"Seventy." But she quickly retracted, "Oh, I don't remember, I'm so dumb."

"Dumb? You're not half so dumb as Mr. Pillsbury." He was an important member of the club.

"Is he dumb?"

"Is Pillsbury dumb? He thinks General Electric is a soldier."

"Well, isn't he?" We pursued the matter no further.

Then the lesson began. She started to make a little hill of sand for the ball. This exhausted my patience.

"Don't you know that you don't use sand to putt?"

"Well, what do you put to putt?"

"Put to putt? What the ——! Never mind the sand, I tell you. We'll play house later! Let me see you putt. You see, Doctor, you're all right, but that's where you fall down, when you putt."

"I must fall down when I putt?"

"No, you *mustn't*—but you *do!*"

"I mustn't, but I do! What are you talking about?"

"Pardon me. You're not Pillsbury's sister, are you?"

"No."

"All right, then let me see you putt. Come on—putt!"

She was all entangled in the frills of her dress like

strings of spaghetti, and by the time she could get one hand loose to put around her club the other was waving aloft like a signal.

"Will you please tell me what you're going to do with that hand?" I inquired, severely.

"Oh, you can hold it," she said absently.

"I don't want it. This is a golf lesson. This isn't Central Park. Now putt. Don't look at me; keep your eye on the ball." She was getting cross-eyed trying to look at both of us, so I crawled down near the cup. She started to aim at me. "Wait!" I cried. "Stick in your tongue. You don't putt with your tongue! That's for approaches."

She putted. The ball rolled for a short distance, then turned crooked in its course. I could depend on it.

"That's near enough, near enough—by way of Syracuse."

"That ball always rolls crooked," she complained. "Why can't I get it in that little thing-a-ma-jig?"

"Thing-a-ma-jug? That's a cup! Not a jug!"

"Well, why don't I get it in the cup!"

"You don't bend over enough. You see, Doctor, you must be dressed for golf—that is, there are certain things you can't wear when you play golf. Now, if I wore a high collar I couldn't bend, either."

"Yes, I know, but I don't wear a high collar," she said in her husky, mannish tone.

"Well, whatever you do wear, you shouldn't ——"

"Oh, you mean a corset."

I was shocked. "Oh, Doctor!" I cried, hiding my face. "I couldn't say it!"

To get her set for the game I bent her into a right angle and she couldn't bend back. Aching, twisted, and half paralyzed, she could hardly raise the club.

"That's fine! Now putt!"

She did and the ball rolled crooked. Exasperated, she swung the club at me, but I drew out the flag pole to defend myself. We fenced like that all over the green until she broke into tears.

"Now, Doctor, don't cry," I said, soothing her. "Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day. You've only been putting two years."

She revenged herself on me, however, when she caught me later on in the ladies' locker-room, where I had been hiding bootleg supplies. To explain my presence there I pretended to be sick, and Dr. Fitch, my golf pupil, put me through every torture of electrical science. This was by far the funniest scene of the show and consisted chiefly of action, with only brief snatches of dialogue interspersed. It was the best physical-comedy scene I have ever played, and Jobyna Howland did her part so well that I always had real aches and pains when it was over.

After giving my neck a light wrench, she sat me in an electric chair that sparked and sizzled.

"Sit there," she ordered, "and don't get up until you count ten ——"

"Ten!" I cried, instantly.

"No, count slowly."

"Five and five."

"No, slowly! For if you count over fifteen it might burn you a little."

"Might burn me a little?" I remonstrated, while the electric current held me in its grip. "1-2-3-4-15-600-900 ——"

Dr. Fitch went to answer a telephone call while I screamed in the thousands. When she finally turned off the current I rushed to a fire pail, sat in it, and fanned myself with a palm leaf. I tried to steal out, but this was only the beginning. Dr. Fitch insisted on curing me and stretched me out on an osteopath table. She chopped her hands up and down my spine, crushing me with her elbow every time I bobbed up. Then she made a handle of my hair and tried to see if my head was removable. After that she slammed me about unmercifully and swung each of my legs from one end of the table to the other. When I finally got off I staggered over to the electric chair, sat in it, and motioned for her to turn on the switch. She did, with a graceful smile, and the scene blacked out.

In the caddie-shop scene there were echoes of "Joe's Blue Front," and the old clothing-shop keeper came back to stand me in good stead. Once a comedian has struck certain styles of comedy that suit him, it is interesting to follow the many variations he devises, so that he can use the same idea and yet conceal it. But in the

caddie shop I introduced a novel trick of dialogue, where by constantly repeating a single word it steadily mounted to a laugh.

Pillsbury, a guest of the club, entered the shop to buy a blue sweater. While in "Joe's Blue Front" I would have bewildered him with a dozen ridiculous sweaters of all colors, here I got the same effects by simply plugging a single word, "blue" and using lines instead of props.

"You want a sweater—blue?" I inquired.

"Yes, Blue."

"Must be a blue one?"

"Yes! Blue!"

"In other words, a blue sweater!" I began to look over my stock. "Don't you want an umbrella?"

"No! I want a sweater—a blue one!"

"A blue sweater!" I mused to myself, searching the boxes on the shelves.

"Yes! Blue!" reiterated Pillsbury, apparently peeved.

"Blue! A blue one. What size?"

"Size thirty-eight—blue."

"Blue. I beg your pardon, you said blue?"

"I said blue!" returned Pillsbury, angrily.

"Just to verify it, that's all," I said, soothingly. "We have some lovely underwear."

"I don't need underwear!"

"Aren't you lucky! Most people do."

Pillsbury started indignantly.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we're all out of sweaters." He

turned toward the door with a dejected air. "Now don't be discouraged. Remember, there's always the river."

I finally sold him a red cap.

The scene in "Kid Boots" that ranked nearest to the Osteopath Scene for laughs was one that rose directly out of the plot and needed no extraneous gags. This is ideal and rare, for if the story can so be turned that its crucial moments are handled lightly and in fun, then the story helps the fun and the fun helps the story.

In this case the situation revolved about a championship golf match to be played by the rivals for Polly's hand and heart. I was trying to help Tom, the hero, get into the match, and the only way was to incapacitate his friend Valentine, who had been selected by the club to represent it.

For more than five minutes I stood behind the counter with a hammer, poising it over Valentine at various times as if to crown him and make way for Tom. The comedy was primarily one of action and stage business. As I got into position for the attack, with the hammer behind my back, I inquired of Valentine, "If you were sick tomorrow you couldn't play, could you?"

"I should say not."

"How do you feel?"

"Why, I feel all right."

"I was just thinking, if anything happened to you, Tom would take your place ——"

"Yes, of course, Tom is my logical successor."

"He'd take your place?"

Valentine lit a cigarette and I covered my eyes while lifting the hammer to strike him. But I weakened.

"Even—even if you had a sprained wrist you couldn't play?"

"No! The slightest thing would incapacitate me."

I wiped my brow, lifted two hammers, but hesitated again.

"Do you know anything about the law?" I suddenly inquired.

"I studied law—I'm a lawyer."

"Oh, you're a lawyer!" I put down both hammers. "I guess you could tell me what is assault?"

"Assault and battery?"

"I know what a battery is. I mean just plain assault."

"If one person strikes another with intent to injure, that is assault ——"

"But if it's an accident?"

"Oh, well, if it's really an accident, then the person can't be punished."

"He can't be punished?" I asked, eagerly.

"No."

"Umph! That's a good law." I lifted the hammer with renewed confidence. "You feel all right?"

"I feel splendid."

"But if you had an injured wrist—*zowie*—the match would be off."

"But—*zowie*—I haven't an injured wrist."

"Ah, but you have an injured wrist!" I dropped the

hammer on his hand and he let out a yell that rocked the caddie shop. "Gosh! What an accident!"

Tom got into the golf match, but one of my intrigues miscarried and the crooked golf ball that was intended for his rival found its way into Tom's bag. He played eighteen holes with the loaded pill and lost the game. But to the very end the comedian was concerned with the vital points of the plot, for when I confessed that the crooked ball was mine, the match was voided and Tom won the girl.

There was one other comedy scene in the show, entirely distinct from the rest in style and conception. It was called the "Nineteenth Hole"—a small drinking bar where I stood deeply grieved at the misfortune that had befallen Tom, due to my crooked golf ball. Dr. Fitch and Pillsbury joined me there and we almost drank ourselves into a coma. This led to the discussion of sex complex.

In a musical show, comedy is timed and graded very much like climaxes. The kind of fun that demands a mental effort from the audience is good at nine-thirty. But at ten-thirty the audience is getting tired and the comedy rising out of situations must bow to good old hokum and sheer nonsense. And the "Nineteenth Hole" is one of the best examples of good nonsense.

I asked Pillsbury, "Do you know anything about sex complex?"

"Do I! I should say I do!"

"I'll try you out. In what part of the anatomy is the jugular vein?"

"What part of it?"

"That's what I said—what part of the anatomy is the jugular vein?"

"What part of it?"

"You know—*I'm* asking *you!*"

"Why?"

I admitted I didn't know why, but just then Dr. Fitch entered and we both felt relieved.

"Ah, Doctor!" we exclaimed.

"Ah, liquor!" she perceived. And promptly guzzled.

"That's to be sold, you know," I reminded her. We decided to ask her. Surely a doctor would know.

"Dr. Fitch, where is the jugular vein?"

"Oh, I don't know—somewhere near the Amazon River."

"No!" We were both flabbergasted.

"No?"

"No!"

"No? Maybe not. I'm very deficient in my geography."

"That's not geography. That's sex complex."

"Don't be vulgar!"

"Oh, it's dirty? Well, well, well!"

"Boots, don't you know what it is?"

"Yes, tell us what is the precise meaning of sex complex," urged Pillsbury.

"You folks don't know?" I inquired.

"No."

"That makes it easier. Sex complex is a scientific—that is—there are two kinds of people—male and female—and deep in the jungle—the lioness—is the mother—give up? Now then, in the wolf family—and ofttimes among the spotted leopards—there is a difference."

"A great difference?" Dr. Fitch asked me, rocking with her fourth glass.

"Oh, sister! Hear ye! Hear ye! Especially among the tigers, and that's why dreams are so important—the subconscious mind is a reservoir ——"

"Huh?"

"A reservoir—reservoir ——" I illustrated by squirting a bottle of seltzer at them. "Of concealed thoughts—secret desires—and any good doctor—any *good* doctor can tell by your dreams just what your secret desires may be ——"

"Oh, Boots," exclaimed Dr. Fitch in her strong basso, "last night I dreamed there were three wild men chasing me."

"Oh, Doctor! That wasn't a dream, that was a wish. But dreams alone don't explain sex complex."

"No?"

"No—deep in the jungle ——"

"Oh, must we go back there again?"

"Everything starts with animal life—even children start in with animal crackers—aminals—aminals—I mean animals are smart—think of how many centuries ago the mother elephant knew that some day there would be

circuses!" Here I had to squirt seltzer again to revive my groggy friends and prepare them for this profound observation. "But mark you, animals alone are not vice-a-versa!"

"No!" they readily agreed, but then seemed doubtful, "No?"

"Why of course not! Take a zebra ——"

"Zebra?" inquired the learned doctor. "What is a zebra?"

"A zebra is a sport-model jackass. And that's why I say—give me a word—lying down, with six letters—that is the gender of zebra! Do you know why you didn't know? Because that word has no cinnamon!"

My erudition baffled them completely and we concluded this intellectual discourse with the solemn anthem, "We were only playing leap frog!"

"Kid Boots" ran in New York until February, 1925, to a box office of one million, seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It traveled on the road until late in 1926 and earned a gross total of three million dollars.

I had now reached what seemed to be the height of my profession. In the old Henry Street days I had never dreamed of such a leap to success and popularity. And often, at the different stages of my progress, I would go down to the old haunts, take a walk around the park in Rutgers Square, or wander along the memory-laden trail of Henry Street. At least for a little while I wanted to meet again the Eddies that I once had been, the toothless Eddie who had climbed through a transom to help

loot a bicycle store and the famished one with popping eyes and hollow cheeks who rented a pair of trousers to play the amateur night at Miner's.

Back-stage I now carried on a complete and separate life from the comic caddie in the golf club. And after every exit I had to pick up the thread where I had left it for my cue. I had to answer a great deal of fan mail, I dictated articles, thought up skits for revues, concerned myself with welfare work. Prominent persons from every sphere of life visited my dressing-room now—Governor Smith, Ex-Ambassador Gerard, Ambassador Claudel of France, Marcus Loew, Adolph Zukor, Paul Block, Commander Byrd, Harold Lloyd, Jesse Lasky, Mayor Walker, and, contrasted with them, newsboys, gunmen, sick and destitute, old acquaintances from the East Side—all anxious for a helping hand, making this little room the center of their world and hoping for anything from an autograph to a new start in life.

On June 1st, 1925, my wife and I sailed to Europe for our first trip of rest and pleasure. It was entirely different from our second-class honeymoon eleven years before. That was a contest of thrift and industry. She washed clothes, while I acted, and both skimped. This time it was a contest of spending. Every morning we decided on the best place to eat, the nicest place to visit; only once we went back to a humble spot of memory just to marvel how we were able to endure it. "But remember," Ida cautioned, "no matter how swell you get, your

hat must always fit the head of the little boy on Henry Street!"

When we returned to New York the captain of the liner called me up on the bridge, and through his binoculars I could see a yacht approaching, flying the banner of "Kid Boots." The company, headed by George Olsen and his band, had sailed out to welcome us back. As we neared them, the band struck up "Eddie, Behave," and Ethel Shutta, comedienne of the Follies, led the welcoming party in song. It was on this trip that George Olsen and Ethel kindled the romance which later led to their marriage.

"Kid Boots" went on the road again, but I was beginning to long for some new avenue of expression. For some time I had cherished the hope of entering the movies. One day I did a short subject for the DeForrest Phonofilm just to test my chances. When the film played at the Rivoli, Lasky happened to see it and said to Walter Wanger, his manager-in-chief, "There is a screen personality."

Lasky bought the motion-picture rights to "Kid Boots" for sixty-five thousand dollars, with the proviso that I play the lead in the film version. When I went to Hollywood to start my first picture, I found that the man in full charge of its production was an old boyhood chum of mine from Henry Street, Ben Shulberg.

Chapter XIX

WHILE the thought of living in Hollywood thrilled my children, yet they were reluctant to leave our home in Mount Vernon where they had built up pleasant friendships and associations. I tried to comfort them.

"Look who your new friends will be! I'll have Gloria Swanson play jacks with you and you'll skip rope with Vilma Banky!"

Margie, my oldest, was skeptical.

"Yeh! And I suppose you'll get Norma Shearer to wait on us at table!"

But when I suggested that we leave three weeks before school closed, they were promptly converted.

On arriving in Los Angeles, we rented a bungalow in Beverly Hills and left the door open for Chaplin, Fairbanks, and Rin-Tin-Tin to walk in. But Margie says the only regular caller we had was the landlord.

Personally, I looked forward to my Hollywood visit with a good deal of excitement. I had read so much about this hell's kitchen in the newspapers that I brought along a one-piece cutaway bathing suit to wear to banquets. I expected to see a repetition of the old Roman days when emperors threw parties on the street and half-naked men and women caroused on beds of roses. Instead, it turned out to be a small factory town, very provincial and terribly industrious. For the first time in my life I had to wake up at dawn and get into make-up so I could be shot at sunrise.

Everybody went around in some disguise and you couldn't tell whether the cop on the beat was an extra or whether the bootlegger he was shooting after was a star. The whole population marched out in the morning carrying make-up boxes, and long lines of laborers filed into the picture factories to put in a day's work as villains, kings, pirates, and Indian chiefs.

The town is mainly divided into two huge production plants, and at the head of each of these is a mere youngster. Irving Thalberg, aged thirty, supervises the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer output, and Ben P. Shulberg, thirty-six, does the same for Famous Players. Each of these factory foremen gets a quarter of a million dollars a year, which I understand is a little more than the union scale. They are thoroughly efficient, shrewd masters of production, and the only thing they carry on the hip is contracts. All the big names, I found, were sober, earnest people who lived on diets and answered fan mail. There are undoubtedly wild scenes in Hollywood, but they only take place when you ask for a raise.

After punching a time-clock I was ready for my début in pictures. In casting "Kid Boots" for the screen, Ben Shulberg selected three of the most beautiful girls in filmdom—Billie Dove, Natalie Kingston, and Clara Bow. I was unused to screen methods at first, and the director, Frank Tuttle, had to cut my stage tempo to half its speed. My style of acting was altogether too fast and made the camera eye blink. Afterward, on my return to

the Follies in 1927, it took me several days to regain my original pace.

Clara Bow proved most helpful to me with suggestions and advice. She told me, "What rehearsals are to the stage, spontaneity is to the screen." In this art, more than in any other form of acting, the first principle is to be yourself. She is. She is never camera conscious and acts with the same ease on the set as she would in her home. In some of our scenes together she was supposed to scold me severely. But while the camera ground away at our quarrel and caught all her pretty frowns, she was really saying, "Eddie, you're doing fine! Just flash those banjo eyes and there's nothing to it!"

Frank Tuttle followed the same principle of spontaneity. In several scenes he let me run loose, instructing the camera men to keep on filming regardless of what I did, and to my great surprise, as well as his, some of the funniest bits in the picture were born that way. One of them was an imaginary love scene that I carried on with my own arm. By pulling up one sleeve, powdering the arm, and tying my watch-chain around the wrist like a bracelet, it created the illusion of a woman's arm, the rest of her body apparently concealed behind the side of a door. My own girl, sitting at another table, could see me flirting with this hand, holding it tenderly and finally kissing it, while it gently pushed me aside. She grew jealous, came over to attack the hidden vamp, only to discover that it was my arm. Another bit was an im-

promptu Charleston that I danced when a chunk of ice slid under my collar and down my bare back.

Tuttle knew that I was accustomed to play before audiences and that their laughter would stimulate my sense of ad-libing. To help me along in these scenes he collected a crowd of onlookers and they laughed at so much per day. I never got so many laughs in my life.

But there were also serious moments in the production. One of them was when I had to kiss Clara Bow. It seems we got everything right but that, and we had to do it over and over again. And when Clara kisses you, you have been osculated! She could kiss a tree and start a forest fire! And what a figure! How it vibrates and quivers! It's like the New York Telephone Company. Every line is busy!

We had mood music for our scenes. The band would set us in an atmosphere of romance or frivolity, and after the shots were taken, Clara Bow, Frank Tuttle, Billie Dove, and others of the company would gather on the set and ask me to entertain them with some numbers. I sang as many songs out on the movie lot as I did in Coney Island long ago, but without waiting on anyone.

There were many daredevil stunts in "Kid Boots," and I was soon initiated into the mystery of doubles. Whenever there is an element of danger the star is exempt. Some stunt man doubles for him, often risking his life for a few dollars. After all, why should the star take a

chance when he has a wife or two, three automobiles, and a swimming-pool dependent on him.

In the Cliff Scene of "Kid Boots," which made the movie audiences gasp, doubles were used for both Clara Bow and myself. In most of the hazardous scenes everything was done by doubles, except in the case of the horse, and later on he complained about it. Only once did I double for myself, and heartily regretted it.

The picture showed me being dragged along the ground by a galloping horse, with a rope around my waist. When this shot was taken I was tied not to the galloping horse, but to a slow-moving automobile, the director riding alongside me in a moving camera truck. While I was running, supposedly pulled by the frantic steed, the director told me to skip gracefully. I tried it and fell. The automobile dragged me some distance over the rough road before it was stopped. My knees were bleeding and gravel had cut my hands, lodging deep under the skin. I had to spend several hours in getting the gravel removed. If I needed sand to make good in pictures, I surely got enough then for the rest of my career.

The method of shooting scenes was something new to me. On the stage I had been trained to a strict logical sequence of the story. But here the director jumbled parts of the middle with the end and shot them before the beginning, so that I first ran off with the girl and later was introduced to her. In the same way, Billie Dove was married to the hero, and some time after, I arranged their first meeting.

The reason for this was economy. All bits of action that occurred in a certain set or location were taken regardless of their sequence in the story. The director also bunched those scenes that involved his leading stars, so as to shorten their playing time and save on the payroll. By this means he "killed off" the principals as quickly as possible. Billie Dove, who appeared in the picture right up to the end, was through with all her scenes the first week. And while "Kid Boots" took more than a month to film, Billie Dove got only one week's salary.

On the movie lot I met my old friend, Raymond Griffith, who eleven years before had advised me how to handle my first musical comedy rôle in "Canary Cottage." We recalled the stunts he had taught me to get by the watchful eye of Trixie Friganza. It was a laughing matter now. On the next lot to ours, Emil Jannings was preparing his first American production, "The Way of All Flesh." Though a native of Brooklyn according to press reports, he knew little of the language, and he and I often attracted attention in restaurants as we played our thoughts in pantomime for each other.

One evening I spoke at a dinner in the movie colony and Jannings' wife, sitting next to him, translated my remarks in a whisper, with the result that a few minutes after the audience laughed he would break into a roar. This startled me, and not knowing the cause at the time, I observed: "Emil Jannings isn't German. He must be English!"

On the other side of "Kid Boots" was the lot reserved

for Adolphe Menjou, then working on his picture, "The Man in Evening Dress." Menjou, who, according to my daughter Margie, "chews gum in the most adorable manner," is meticulous not only about his gum. He studies his parts with great insight and care, is as charming and refined off the screen as on and is one of the few movie actors who brings to his work a great amount of education, understanding, and culture.

One day Menjou and I went up in an airplane for the experience, and I took along my colored valet, Benny. When we finally came down to earth again, Menjou remarked, "Why, Benny, you turned white!"

"You wasn't blushing, either, Mr. Menjou," said Benny.

On another occasion, when Menjou visited me in my dressing-room, he asked Benny, "What's today's date?"

"I don't know the date, sir," replied the valet.

"Look at that newspaper," I told him.

Benny dismissed the suggestion.

"Aw, that's yesterday's paper," he said with a wave of the hand. Benny had formerly been Harry K. Thaw's valet. Maybe that explains it.

On another lot, some distance away, the great picture, "Wings," was being filmed and Richard Arlen, who played in it, would come over to our studio after work to meet his sweetheart, Jobyna Ralston. Jobyna had been Harold Lloyd's leading lady and played with me in "Kid Boots." There was only one spot in the picture where I had occasion to kiss her, but every time I noticed Dick

Arlen approaching, I pretended to rehearse the kissing scene with Jobyna. We did it so realistically that Dick began to get worried. This probably had something to do with their early marriage.

Life on the movie lots carried with it a fascination far greater than mere parties or banquets. While huge armies worked in each inclosure to build the flashes of city, country, and far-away places embraced in the gleam of each camera eye, there was a little French restaurant right outside the studios where the most amazing medley of all ages and nations would assemble daily for the midday meal.

Mme. Helène's was the famous rendezvous for the stars of cinema. There you would see Wallace Beery in a sailor costume lunching with Florence Vidor, adorned as a countess. Raymond Griffith in a high hat would be rolling dice for his lunch with young Lawrence Grey. Richard Dix in football togs would be eating pie *à la mode*, and dainty Bebe Daniels would be sitting over her bowl of spinach. It was all she ate. You wondered how she could do all she did on that bit of green grass. She was a hard worker and had a keen practical brain. She bought real estate in her spare time and closed profitable deals. On the lot she was one of the most daring movie actresses, and the easiest job was to double for Bebe, for most of the hair-raising, spectacular stunts she performed herself. Adolphe Menjou, immaculately stenciled in his fashion-plate, might be eating with a hobo who was paying for both, and the hobo would be Chester Conklin.

Later, when the "King of Kings" was filmed, stately biblical figures began to wander into Mme. Helène's little lunch-room, and the rulers of ancient Rome and Judea mingled with the aviators from "Wings" and the train robbers from "Special Delivery." Visitors thronged to this little world of magnificent chaos where time, place, and history were thrown together like the colors in a ball of agate, and they gladly paid the high tariff tagged to each small dish of food. But the joke was on the actors. For though they made the place the attraction it was, they had to pay the same high tariff themselves.

The gala event of Hollywood, however, was not the daily luncheon at Mme. Helène's, but New-Year's eve at the Mayfair Club. Here, indeed, scintillated the entire glory of moviedom. The ballroom needed no candelabra, for it blazed with a million watts of diamonds. The jewels of the profession were assembled in stone and in person. You saw Jack Dempsey in his civilian nose, with Estelle Taylor sparkling on his arm. There was Jobyna Ralston dancing with William Powell, the brutal villain who had killed her in a picture only a week before. Pola Negri, the gypsy vampire, would be floating on the arm of Charlie Rogers, the guileless juvenile. All parts had been abandoned now to play their parts in life. And the world of make-believe receded into the shadows of the vacant movie lots at the dazzle and grandeur of this richer, real world. I sang at the Mayfair Club to entertain my colleagues, and Dempsey and I staged a mock battle.

That evening left a stirring impression on my mind and I marveled at this new world of iridescent splendor representing many millions, many romances, many miracles more wonderful than Aladdin and Sinbad ever dreamed to see, and it had all come into being through the imagination and business brains of a former furrier, a former druggist, and a former cornet-player—Adolph Zukor, Joe Schenck, and Jesse Lasky.

"Kid Boots" took six weeks to film. It could have been completed in five weeks, which would have established a record for a big picture, but one solid week was devoted to a single stunt scene which afterward did not even appear at the first showing. In this scene I was all set to dive backward from a springboard about twenty-five feet in the air to impress my girl, not knowing that my rival was emptying the pool to impress my skull. While I made elaborate preparations on the springboard the water was being steadily drained, and when I finally took the back dive I was plunging headlong into a pool as dry as Hoover would like it.

The diving illusion into a dry stone pool was accomplished by the use of rollers which the movie audience could not see. I was slid across the full length of the pool on these rollers right into the arms of my husky rival, Malcolm Waite, who received me warmly with two fists. There was a deal of accessory horse-play and slapstick connected with this scene, but when Ben Shulberg saw the picture at the preview he thought it was all too mechanical. He believed that, since I had played such a

legitimate character throughout "Kid Boots," it would be best to avoid this lapse into hokum. A week's extravagant labor was erased with a word.

When the picture was finally completed and while it was still being studied in the projection room for cuts and revisions, I lost no time in getting my tickets for New York, figuring that they could never really hurt a man three thousand miles away.

At Chicago I stopped for breath. There I met Georgie Jessel and my insurance agent, Jack Kreindel. It was comforting to travel the last lap of the trip with friends and confide to them my fears about the picture. They tried to divert me with a game of cards, but I lost, and that depressed me more. At eleven we retired to our berths in the compartment. I lay sleepless for more than an hour, and noticed that Georgie was restless, too. It would be nine hours before we pulled into New York. As we lay for a time whispering to each other, Jack Kreindel's deep slumber broke upon us in thunderous snores.

"We've got to fix that guy," Jessel finally decided.

"O. K.," I replied.

We got up and began to dress. It was after one. I nudged Kreindel.

"What'sa matter?" he started.

"Hurry up," I said. "The train pulls into Grand Central in half an hour." Jessel and I continued to dress in the most matter-of-fact manner. We brushed our teeth, combed our hair.

Kreindel stretched happily. "Gee! I slept like a log!" he exclaimed. "The night passed like a minute!"

"You'll be late!" said Jessel, curtly, and Kreindel started to dress. "Boys, I had a great night's sleep!" he continued, getting into his clothes; but we disregarded him as we put on our coats. He was soon dressed and rang for the porter.

The porter arrived, looking drowsy. "Yessir?"

"Hurry up! Take out these bags," said Jack. "We're late!"

"What for?" inquired the porter, opening his eyes wide.

"We'll be in New York in a few minutes!" persisted Kreindel, sternly.

"You will?" cried the porter. "We just pulled out of Cleveland and we got eight more hours to go!"

Three weeks after my return to New York I received a wire from Ben Shulberg. It read:

HOLLYWOOD, August 27, 1926.

EDDIE CANTOR,
New York.

DEAR EDDIE—Previewed "Kid Boots" last night stop Would have done your heart good to see how much audience liked you stop Picture has everything it needs to make it popular entertainment stop Will have print in New York in about four weeks for you to see stop You can accept my honest assurance you have no occasion for any further worry about picture or your screen personality kindest regards.

B. P. SHULBERG.

Two weeks after this one I received another telegram. It was from Jesse Lasky himself.

Having just seen "Kid Boots" I hasten to congratulate you stop Picture will be success and your performance is outstanding and proves conclusively to my mind you have all qualifications for successful screen career kindest personal regards.

"Kid Boots" opened at the Rialto Theatre, New York, the first week of October, 1926. I was engaged to make a personal appearance with the picture at seventy-five hundred dollars a week. As a compliment to me on my screen début, George Olsen and his band insisted on coming to the Rialto to accompany my numbers.

I played to a new public, the majority of them people who had never seen me on the stage because they could not afford the Ziegfeld rates. In one material respect I had to change my style. For as I improvised and varied the program the same people staid on after each showing instead of emptying the house to let in a new crowd. It was good for me, but not good for business.

I finally stuck to a single routine, and after that the crowds moved briskly. The picture played an entire month at the Rialto, which was a record for one's first picture. "Kid Boots" ranked seventh among the first ten hit productions of the year from the Famous Players' studio, and earned seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I was reëngaged for another picture. I had received only three thousand dollars a week for the first one, but for my work in the new one I received one hundred and fourteen thousand dollars, or eight times as much.

Chapter XX

"SPECIAL DELIVERY," my second picture, was an original story written by myself. I had intended to create a more human, less hoky vehicle only sparsely interspersed with gags. But when the story was rewritten for the screen and finally produced, everything between laughs was cut out, giving the hoppy, hiccupy effect of a comic strip or a stale-joke book. It was one of those sad cases of authorship where I saw my brain-child get its brains knocked out and I had to be an accomplice to the crime.

One incident will illustrate what happened. I had a scene with Mary Carr, who, when the final picture unraveled itself from the mess, was not even in the film. Mary Carr played the mother of a boy who had left home and had never written her after that. Day after day, as I passed with my mail-pouch, the old lady would intercept me, asking, "Mr. Letter-carrier, anything for me?"

"No. No word from your Jimmy," I told her.

Tears trembled in her eyes as she turned back to her house. One day I resolved to bring her a letter from Jimmy. Before approaching her doorstep I sat down on another stoop and wrote a letter to the old lady, saying:

Dear Mother—I'm sorry I ran away from home. I've been ill but I'm well now. Inclosed find ten dollars for spending money. Please write me care of General Delivery, Scranton, Pa.

Your loving son, Jimmy.

I handed the letter to Mary Carr. She opened it while I lingered on to watch her emotion. She kissed the letter, took the ten-dollar bill with a grateful expression, and went joyfully into the house. A few hours later, passing along the same route, I met Mary Carr going to mail a letter. I knew it was addressed to her lost son and insisted on mailing it for her. From now on I would be her lost son. When she left me I opened the letter eagerly and read,

My dear boy, I was happy to hear from you. Keep well. Thanks for sending the ten dollars. I know you have sent me many a ten-dollar bill, but the postman on our block looks like an awful crook. In the future please send money orders. Your loving mother.

This whole episode was photographed and shown in the projection-room, where it was received with enthusiasm. James Cruz, one of our great motion-picture directors, happened to be there at the time and said it was one of the finest touches he had seen in pictures. Yet the whole thing was not even shown at the preview, and I don't know why to this day.

Another serious alteration in the story was caused by the federal authorities. Our plot centered about a mail robbery, during which I, as a rookie postman, accidentally captured the robber chief single-handed after a series of funny mishaps. This made me undeservedly a hero and won me the girl for whose hand a fireman and a policeman had also aspired.

It was not until the picture had gotten well under way that we learned the government would not permit the showing of even a comical mail robbery on the screen. Had this been discovered before we started to shoot the picture, it would have altered all our plans and most probably we would have selected a different story altogether. But as it stood it was too late to turn back, and instead of the mail robbery we introduced a bucket-shop broker who used the mails to defraud. This switched the picture into conventional lines and diminished its strength considerably.

With the story weakened and the human element destroyed, we started to gag and almost suffocated. Of the two hundred or more gags that we filmed I liked one particularly. Tired of lugging my load of mail through the streets and up the stairs, I suddenly paused beside a hurdy-gurdy. I asked the organ-grinder whether he could play, "Bye-Bye, Blackbird." He churned out the tune and I began to sing it. A great crowd gathered to see and hear this strange street exhibit, and when the people were all assembled I distributed my mail among them, calling the roll from the letter pile.

In another scene a big bull-dog was supposed to jump for frankfurters that I held. The trainer was not around that day and his assistant had little standing with the dog. The bull thought my leg was the frankfurter and dug his teeth into it. The wound had to be cauterized, or "cantorized," as the men on the lot put it. This was

the only realistic bit in the picture and it happened off the screen.

During the shooting of "Special Delivery," Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford visited my lot. "Oh, how we could use both of you in this picture!" I said. But they didn't take the hint.

Another guest was Morris Gest. "You might own this production," I told him.

"How's that, Eddie?"

"If it goes over it's another 'Miracle'!"

Somehow I felt that this was far below the promise born of "Kid Boots," but there seemed to be nothing we could do about it. We just glided along with it, but the glide was downstream.

While the picture was still in the cutting-room, being glued together for the preview, I traveled to New York and back to California, a distance of six thousand miles, to play a single benefit performance for my Boys' Camp. The Camp Committee counted on my appearance, and I did not want to disappoint them. I arrived at the Casino Theatre the night of the benefit, played there, and the next day I was on the train returning to the Coast.

During my stay in California I had an impulse to play two theaters which belonged to a circuit that had turned down Al Lee and myself at a salary of three hundred and twenty-five dollars a week in 1915. This time they gladly paid me forty-five hundred dollars a week and I didn't work half so hard as in the days with Lee.

But the years of ceaseless activity on the stage coupled

Eddie and His Boys of Surprise Lake Camp

NATHAN S. JONAS

with numberless benefits that I always played in spare intervals had accumulated their toll of strain and fell upon me like an avalanche. As "Special Delivery" drew to a close, so did my strength. I had been losing weight, could not digest properly, and suffered from enervating fatigue. I began to visit doctors and read all the magazines in their waiting-rooms back to 1860. I learned the difference between a general practitioner and a specialist. I found out that an ordinary doctor may treat you for pleurisy and you die of a broken leg. But not with a specialist! Whatever he treats you for you die from.

They finally decided it was my tonsils. I planned to go to New York for the operation. Wallace Beery asked me, "Why should you go to New York when you can take them out here?"

"But they're New York tonsils!" I argued. And New York got them.

Even after that my condition showed little improvement. Anticipating the worst, I resolved to increase my life insurance, and Betty, Will Rogers' wife, sent a doctor to examine me for an additional policy. He asked me the usual questions and I gave the usual answers. We were getting along swimmingly when Ida walked into the room. She didn't know it was an examination for insurance and was anxious that the doctor should know everything that would help him make a correct diagnosis.

"Have you been to any doctors recently?" he inquired.

"I haven't been to a doctor in years!"

"Eddie!" my wife exclaimed, surprised. I tried to

signal her, but the medical examiner kept his eyes riveted on mine.

"Were you ever seriously sick?" he continued.

"Never!"

"Eddie!" my wife repeated, this time more reproachfully. I began to feel alternately flushed and chilled.

"Ever have any trouble in your chest?" he asked.

"My chest? Oh no!"

Ida could restrain herself no longer.

"Why don't you tell the doctor about your pleurisy?" she cried, amazed that I should have overlooked such an important fact. The doctor stared hard at me.

"Ha-ha!" I laughed, uneasily. "Can you imagine, Doc, I forgot that!"

"H'm, h'm!" he muttered. "Anything else the matter with you?"

"Not a thing! I'm perfect!"

"Is that so!" Ida was beside herself. "Why don't you tell him about the rash that came out on your back and your bum knee? You know it sometimes snaps out of place! And that choking feeling you get at night, and how tired you are after the least exertion, and how you can't sleep, and what all those big professors said is the matter with you!"

"It's marvelous how women remember these trifles!" I said, grinning foolishly. "They're not important, doc."

"I wouldn't say that," said the doc.

"Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

"I guess that will do," he observed, kindly, taking his hat. It did do. I was politely rejected.

The time had come for my return to Ziegfeld. He had wired me that he would do no more Follies shows unless I consented to star in the next one. I realized the difficulty of bearing the full weight of a whole revue on my shoulders, but in consideration for this Ziegfeld was willing to shorten the term of our contract. If I starred in his next Follies he would take a year off the agreement, which still had three to run. The deal was arranged. I lost a year from my contract and five from my life. It was the hardest individual work I ever did in any show.

On the train coming east Irving Berlin and I laid out the plans for the 1927 Follies. For his end of the production Irving Berlin received five per cent of the gross, which was the highest royalty ever paid to a composer of musical comedy. It was so high that even Berlin was impressed. One day while crossing Times Square a taxicab grazed my toes and Berlin pulled me back with a jerk.

"For Heaven's sake, Eddie, be careful!" he cried. "Think of my royalties!"

As is customary in a production like the Follies, a large number of extra scenes are prepared with the view to eliminating the dull ones after a tryout. But in this case there didn't seem to be any dull ones and we retained them all. The comedy skits furnished a wide range of humor from an aviation setting to a bird shop. The two sketches that became most popular in New York were the Taxicab Scene

and the Mayor Walker Scene. In fact, there was scarcely a musical production after that which did not include an impersonation of the Mayor.

The Taxicab Scene was my newest variation on the old reliable physical-comedy act. It represented a modern he-girl escorting home a modest she-man and trying to flirt with him. The bashful boy resisted and the bold bad lady persisted. At last she exclaimed in disgust, "You're the coldest proposition!"

"I'm sorry," I retorted with dignity. "I'm sorry we're not the same temperature."

The quarrel led to my being kicked out of the cab. I was invited to walk the remaining ten miles or else agree to be mauled with affection.

"I guess I'll else," I wailed, crawling back to my seat.

As Mayor of the City of New York I was kept permanently busy posing for photographers and turning the city over to visiting channel swimmers, athletic champions of tennis and golf, crowned heads, and aviators. The office of Mayor was not new to me. In 1924, in a contest by popular vote for "Mayor of Broadway" conducted in S. Jay Kaufman's column, I was elected by a plurality of eleven thousand. As the Ziegfeld show was always included in a first-night reception to city guests, I had occasion to coin many impromptu lines welcoming actual celebrities who visited the Follies.

The night Colonel Lindbergh attended the show I asked him whether, in flying over Scotland, he found the air-pockets too tight, and when Ruth Elder was in the

audience I presented her with a key to the city, saying: "You will go down in history as the only woman who was ever picked up on the ocean."

Impromptu situations are the spice of the stage. They have often yielded my best laughs, but in most cases the situation arises but once. Thus in the Animal Store Scene, a dog I employed happened to scratch himself with his hindpaw in a strumming motion, and I dubbed him "Ukelele Ike." It was a spontaneous laugh, but the next night the dog refused to strum.

A more personal type of impromptu jest was the one I played on Dr. Goddard of Philadelphia. He was the surgeon who had operated on Dempsey's nose. In his office, he maintained a severe dignity, but when sitting in the theater he would become so exuberant in his laughter that his collar always wilted from the excitement. When he came to see me in the show I threw him a fresh collar from the stage after every scene.

On October 8, 1927, while playing in my last Follies, I became a father once more. My fifth daughter, little Janet, was born.

"What's the idea, Eddie?" cried Ziegfeld. Even he was flabbergasted. Not to mention myself.

"It's for you, Flo," I replied. "I'm raising my own Albertina Rasch ballet."

Ida suffered severely after the birth of Janet and required several blood transfusions. For some time her life was despaired of and after each performance I spent the rest of the night by her bedside. She recovered and

after a long convalescence regained her normal vigor. One night I returned home with a diamond-studded bracelet, the stones set in platinum. Fifteen years before, when we were engaged, she had gazed at such a bracelet in the window at Tiffany's. It was one of those shining, magic wonders floating in a different world from hers that she never hoped to attain. Now it coiled its gleaming warmth about her wrist. She was delighted as a child. One of Grimm's fairy tales had come true.

I was on the stage nearly two hours every night out of the two and a half. The ordeal broke through my thin resistance and I was taken with a relapse of pleurisy. While playing in Boston I had to quit the 1927 Follies upon the advice of my physicians and submit to a long rest cure. Much publicity attended my illness because Ziegfeld, for some unknown reason, decided I was shamming. He insisted upon an arbitration proceeding before Actors' Equity, and his personal physician, Dr. Wagner, was permitted to examine me and decide whether I was sick or not. Unfortunately, I won. The doctor stethoscoped, fluoroscoped, and X-rayed me and concluded that I was even sicker than I thought. When Ziegfeld heard this, he promptly dropped the rôle of investigator and urged me to go ahead and get a good rest.

I spent six weeks at Palm Springs, California, and then went to the Battle Creek Sanitarium for another six weeks. My health has been gradually restored and today I feel as well as ever. On my return to New York I set to work on the new Ziegfeld musical comedy, "Whoopee!" based

on the farce, "The Nervous Wreck," by Owen Davis. My recent experiences at Battle Creek proved valuable training for just this type of show. Out there, every time I saw a man with a white coat I stuck out my tongue and started to undress.

"Whoopee!" is like a family reunion of many of those who helped make "Kid Boots" a ringer. George Olsen and his band are with me. Ethel Shutta, who is now Mrs. Olsen and already has an Olsen junior, plays the leading comedienne rôle, while William Anthony McGuire who wrought the book of "Kid Boots," is the fashioning hand in "Whoopee!"

Along with my work in the new show I have made a few short subjects for talking pictures in the Paramount Studios on Long Island. If they are favorably received by the public I shall soon do my first long movietone picture. Between the talking films and the new musical play I shall find a happy winter's work, providing the public finds it happy, too.

It is my hope, after these efforts, to enter the producing field and perhaps appear in my first straight play where I will not have to depend on singing or dancing or clapping of hands to get my effects, but upon the simple ability of acting, which maybe I have, after all.

Chapter XXI

PERHAPS this thing I am about to reveal is a little too personal. After all, there is a limit even to candor. But I know the readers expect a certain amount of inside stuff, a keyhole look into those hidden corners of one's private life, otherwise they'll want their money back. Well, I admit today I am keeping six women. It is a remarkable experience. You would imagine this slightly complicates my life, and it does. When I kiss one, all the others get jealous, though not violent.

I've got a system. I don't tell them I'll put them on the stage or try to win them with other promises. I just pay their bills. Besides, I carry on no intrigues. A liberal understanding exists between me and my women. I tell each one frankly that I love all the others, and they stand for it. In fact, they're loyal not only to me, but to each other. And they're so sensitive that if I quarrel with one I have to give them all presents.

I have tried a daring experiment. There are men who might think it wiser to keep six women in different apartments in various parts of the city, but I have them all live in different parts of the same house. It saves taxi fares. In the evening I go from door to door and kiss each one good night. They are all beautiful, running the full gamut of ages from the oldest, who is in the early thirties, to the youngest, who is ashamed to admit it, but she is still teething. They represent every type, manner, and mood of womanhood.

Ida, the oldest, is calm, motherly, staid, and serious. Margie is a lady of thirteen with a weakness for playing Juliet in high-school theatricals. Her ambition is to become a counselor when she grows up, teaching and guiding the young. The other four, ranging from eleven years to eleven months, have decided just to go on eating. Yet they all seem so busy and absorbed in their separate pursuits that I feel like an idler by comparison. Ida goes shopping, Margie reviews movies for the local paper, Natalie, Edna, and Marilyn go to school, and Janet goes to the crib.

Since our return from Hollywood we live in a rented house at Great Neck, Long Island. This is our temporary dwelling until the time when our own home will be erected. It is a spacious, choicely appointed cottage with all improvements, and you can have the lease cheap when our own home is ready. There are big grounds with a nice white fence all around, a vegetable garden and garage space for several cars. It is quite the thing for one who has lived in a two-room basement on Madison Street.

When we gather at the dinner table we are seven—one man among six women. They wait until I come down and always expect me to surprise them in different make-up. I've found that little pranks, funny notions, queer entrances set the house on a roar and help digestion. Ida presses the button under the table and the head waitress enters, followed by an assistant who has another assistant and so they keep on assisting each other. The meal begins. There are many courses, enticing entrées,

soups, roasts, elaborate desserts. Our menu changes twice a week with the cook. It is all on a high scale now. But Margie doesn't eat. She looks wistful and peers longingly into space. I finally find out what is stirring in her soul. She would give the meal, the table, and the whole place along with it, for one hot dog.

It brings back memories. Twenty-five years ago I was an errand boy for the Isaac Gelles Wurst Works and used to carry their daily supply of frankfurters and pickled creations from the factory on Essex Street to the store on Market Street, eating half of the output on the way. I guess Margie would have relished that kind of a job. Maybe these children miss a little of the struggle that their old man had. Life may be sweet but not when there's so much sugar that it gets into the blood. One day little Edna, aged seven, got up and walked out of the house. Nobody suspected that she had left except to play on the lawn. But a few hours later we realized that she was missing. We sounded an alarm. She was finally discovered at the other end of Great Neck, on her way to Mexico. She had gone in quest of romance, adventure, and the unknown.

They must be my daughters. This restless longing is not their only point of resemblance to me. I remember during President Harding's administration my family and I paid the President a visit and he patted the little girls on the head genially, saying, "Eddie, you have bright children."

"Yes," I replied, "when they grow up they'll all vote for Al Smith."

"I guess it's hereditary," observed the President, smiling.

Margie's interest in welfare work is another point of resemblance. Merely to be a stage success has never represented to me the fulfillment of my life's desires. As I look back over the five Eddies I have been, I am glad to find that the actor is not the chief among them. There was the boyhood Eddie of the East Side tenements whose spirit survived the struggles of adversity. There was another Eddie, the business man, who achieved economic independence and security. There was a third Eddie with simple, bourgeois tastes who raised a family and built the comforts of a home. The fourth Eddie rose along Broadway in a blaze of electric lights and satisfied the longing of a lifetime to become a star. But there was also a fifth one, the Eddie who always gave of all his energies and powers to aid those less fortunate than he.

I have never stinted on playing benefits or helping worthy causes. While the field of philanthropy has its queer offshoots, it is in the main the worthiest human pursuit. It is true that sometimes a woman whose name has been left off the letterhead of a hospital or orphan asylum will print her own letterhead and start an opposition charity. It is also true that some benefits cost more than they make, like one at which I was asked to appear, where I showed the committee how it could save five hundred dollars by not running the affair at all. But in gen-

eral I have found charity movements to be worthy and wise and I have always helped them with money and services.

One night I played six benefits, which I think is a record. After attending the ones where I was scheduled to appear, I visited other theaters down the line where I was not expected, and dropped in at the stage-door entrance, asking, "Do you need an actor?" In no place was I rejected.

This service to others has its compensation. As Will Rogers says, "Benefits are great places to try out new material." The audiences are sympathetic and the actor needs just that element of warmth and encouragement to experiment with a novel idea that he wouldn't dare chance before his usual house of cold, critical taskmasters.

Only once was my spirit of benevolence abused. After a performance at the Colonial Theater in Boston, an elderly lady met me at the stage door. She told me how much my performance had touched her. All night she had sat gazing worshipfully at me through her tears. I reminded her of an only son she had lost in the World War. She had spent her last few dollars to see me and would come to see me again, but she hadn't even the money for bread. A lump of emotion gathered in my throat and I pressed a ten-dollar bill into her trembling hand. A few minutes later I met Willie Howard.

"A funny thing happened to me, Eddie," said Willie. "A little old woman with tears in her eyes just stopped me at the stage door and said she spent her last dollar to

see my show because I reminded her of her only son lost in the war. I slipped her a ten-spot. It's very touching, isn't it?"

"It touched me too!" I agreed. But I guess it was worth the ten dollars as a lesson in good acting.

I have always been active in the work of Federation and have served as toastmaster at its dinners and aided in its drives for funds. I am deeply interested in the Big Brother movement and have addressed gatherings for it in nearly all the principal cities, helping to organize and launch the Detroit Chapter and the St. Louis Chapter. On the latter charity venture I made a profit. It cost me nothing to make the speech and in return I got a silver cane with the inscription, "To Big Brother Eddie from his Little Brothers in St. Louis." I was also one of the organizers of the Jewish Theatrical Guild and am its first vice-president. In addition to these activities, I have contributed to and worked for temples, churches, hospitals, memorial drives, and charity funds throughout the country without number.

Even when my strength was ebbing and my energies exhausted I cut down on my work more than on my benefit performances. In this feeble way I constantly tried to extend the actor's scope and establish his position not only as a public entertainer but as a public servant in the best nonpolitical sense of the term. My pet activity, of course, is still the Boys' Camp at Cold Springs, New York, where as a boy, emerging from the city's slums, I saw the first stretch of green that was not a pool table.

And so, engaged in welfare work, secured by sound investments and surrounded by a goodly family, the life of the early Henry Streeter is complete. But there is one thing more. After the children have settled down to their home work and Ida prepares to receive some friends in the parlor, I step out on the lawn. Opposite my house is one of the most magnificent estates in Great Neck. I cross the road and approach its stone gateway. There is a small sign near the entrance reading, "Nathan S. Jonas." As I walk up the wide gravel path I gaze at the unfolding garden plotted majestically across the plain of green and tinted with mellow colors in the last gleams of sunset.

The slum boy of the tenements is learning all about trees and flowers and nature. I gaze at the full-grown elms, white pines, Japanese maples, willows, and beeches. Four years ago this wonder garden was a cornfield. Beyond it were barren tangles of weeds. Now a stately castle rears its armored head upon the hill. It is the story of a modern pioneer, a pilgrim of the twentieth century whose wheels of industry are push-buttons and who accomplishes overnight what it took backwoodsmen many generations to perform.

I ring the doorbell and am admitted to the beautiful château. A stately lady with silver hair and soft blue eyes comes to meet me. She leads me by the hand to a little flower-laden bower at the rear of the house, and there an imposing gentleman with a trace of Southern aristocracy in his manner rises to extend a cordial hand of welcome. I sit down with this elderly couple and a peace-

ful feeling of well-being warms my heart, but my eyes grow moist and filmy. At the age of two I had floundered in the streets and gutters of New York, fatherless and motherless, and now I am sitting in a flower-laden bower with my parents. Mr. and Mrs. Nathan S. Jonas have become father and mother to me.

When I suffered a breakdown while in Hollywood, Jonas said to his wife: "Come, we will go to California. Our boy needs us." And they came on to comfort me and offer me advice and aid. When physicians decided that my tonsils had to be extracted, Jonas was not satisfied until the biggest medical authorities confirmed the decision. He watched over me through my operation and convalescence as he would over a child.

Through the years he had given me wise counsel in all my financial matters and often guided me in the performance of charity work that it might do the most good. When I planned to build a permanent home he gave me ten acres at cost that I might build it near his. Jonas is one of the pioneers in the development of the Lakeville section of Great Neck. In 1923 he bought a hundred and seventy-one acres of ground there at sixteen hundred and fifty dollars an acre. He intended to use the land for his estate, but it occurred to him and a few friends to form a golf club instead and he turned over the contract to the entire property for that purpose at cost.

In that way the Lakeville Golf Club came into being. Jonas was its founder and organizer and is today its treasurer. It is regarded as one of the most beautiful and

exclusive country clubs in America. But it cost Jonas the land for his estate, and when he sought to purchase another parcel he had to pay almost four times the price he had paid in the first place. Now land in Great Neck is worth more than ten thousand dollars an acre, the holdings of the club having risen eight times in value.

I have often wandered with Jonas over his fifty-six-acre estate adjoining the club and shared the joy he takes in this self-made retreat from the business world. Here the banker and the actor go far back to primitive rustic life, but it is idealized and you can detect the magical touch of power and gold in every flower of the garden and every string-bean on the farm. Instead of waiting hundreds of years for saplings to sprout and grow into mighty trees, they rise here in full bloom within the span of a week. Space and time are the slaves that tremble under the wand of wealth. The far ends of the world are gathered here.

There is a giant apple tree from Sea Cliff, dug out with roots and all and transplanted in the Jonas landscape. Next to it stands a weeping beech from Flushing, a Crypt de Maria from Glen Cove, and over there, near an old elm taken from the streets of Great Neck, are white pines recently arrived from Maine. But Nathan Jonas does not depend entirely on the miracle of money. Back of the garden and the castle is a nursery of trees. Here a world of youngsters is being raised and fed from infancy, little peach trees, evergreens, maples, and beeches. In the

future, Jonas will not have to go over the wide world for his trees. He will get them all out of his own back yard.

To the south we enter a boxwood garden reminiscent of Southern estates, for Nathan S. Jonas was born in Montgomery, Alabama, and though he came to Brooklyn when only a year old, he still retains a fondness for his native Southland. There is also a pretty rock garden with a wooden bridge. It is all different from the scrawny flower-pots the old Italian used to sell under the Williamsburgh Bridge. Here wistaria, orchids, magnolias dazzle over the natural rocks and give the little scene an air of fairyland. Did I ever dream that I'd wind up my stage career as a florist?

Jonas and I go into his vegetable and fruit grounds. He and his wife live solely off their farm as simply and plainly as the ancient people in the land of milk and honey. He takes more pride in the twenty-cent meal of green vegetables that he has invented than in all the great banking institutions he has welded into a single control. We have a hearty feast on the pickings as we pluck ripe berries in season, tackle tomatoes from the bush, and pull young cucumbers off the soil. Through the cycle of grandeur and pomp he has returned to the simple and primitive, and I admire him for it. Many bonds, beside gilt-edge ones, join me to Nathan S. Jonas.

We have mutually, tacitly adopted each other. I have even tried to be helpful to him. Before leaving for the Coast I said to him, "I'll look you up a couple of old banks

and you look me up a couple of new gags." And his sense of humor can be depended on. When he served on the Board of Education under Mayors Low and McClellan, he pulled a gag which, if nothing else had happened between us, would have justified my adopting him as my father. It was during the school teachers' agitation for better pay that the spokesman for the teachers exclaimed before the Board of Education, "After all, there is very little difference between men and women!"

"Thank God for the little difference!" observed Jonas.

But the quality that has attracted me most to him is his life-long devotion to charitable service. Even when he was making only a modest income himself he initiated benevolent movements. He founded and organized the Jewish Hospital of Brooklyn, raising its first hundred thousand dollars and developing it almost single-handed into a six-million-dollar institution. Last year, by unanimous vote of the directors and trustees of the hospital, its name was changed to the Nathan S. Jonas Hospital, a unique tribute to a man still living; but at the desire of Jonas this action was rescinded.

He also founded and organized the Brooklyn Federation of Charities as a central agency for the efficient and scientific distribution of funds to all worthy causes. It was after he proved the economy and effectiveness of this organization that the New York charities took the cue and followed suit. During these years that Nathan S. Jonas had risen from an obscure basket salesman and

insurance agent to the leading Jewish philanthropist of Brooklyn and had become president of the Manufacturers Trust Company, his younger brother, Ralph Jonas, was also managing to struggle along in his own modest way.

Ralph had become head of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. He founded the Brooklyn branch of the Ethical Culture School, became a patron of the arts, assisting such talents as Max Rosen, the well-known violinist, and aiding Eva Le Gallienne in her plan for a popular-priced Civic Repertory Theater. Ralph Jonas also donated one million dollars to found the Long Island University, which officially opened its portals of learning September of this year. There were only two other donors to this enterprise of culture—James H. Post, who gave fifty thousand dollars, and Nathan S. Jonas, who contributed twenty-five thousand dollars.

This spirit of philanthropy and welfare work fascinates me. My association with Nathan and Ralph Jonas has therefore not merely been one of business and banking, but I have always stood ready to answer their call and coöperate with them in every benevolent enterprise where they felt my efforts might help. It was a happy choice of family for me. It has filled my life with those elements of kindness and social consciousness that mere acting and the theater could never provide.

As I sit on the porch of the Jonas home, inhaling new and rare species of roses and orchids that Mrs. Jonas

cultivates in her hothouse, my thoughts fly across the dreary years when I wandered, homeless, hungry, and cold, through the lonely nights in the Ghetto. I think of my poor grandmother who toiled in her dingy cellar, lugging the heavy trunks of servant girls to top-floor flats to earn the meager dollars that kept us alive. And I think of my dream-dazed father torn out of the Russian steppes and suddenly transplanted to a new world of roaring engines and electric energy while he tried to play his plaintive little fiddle through it all, with the flush of a dying fever on his sunken cheek and a gnawing pain of sadness in his heart. And I see my dear young mother, in the tiny two-room flat, over the clattering tea-house, urging my father to work, begging him to go out and grapple with this strange Goliath of industry that only frightened and dismayed him. And those two young, sad people, bewildered and worn before their time, were both killed by adversity when a single light of hope or happiness might have changed the whole course of their lives.

And I sit with these two silver-haired people in the twilight, a rich aroma of nature's luxuriant abundance filtering through my whole being. By what strange, indefinable touch has all that misery and suffering been transformed into something grand and symphonic, something so peaceful and majestic! Why can't I imagine that these two are my parents? That their early death and misfortunes were the dark flashes of a nightmare, and that they really live. That they are sitting with me now in

this bower laden with roses riding in happy dignity on the crest of the world!

Nathan S. Jonas takes an accountant's report from a table. "Here, Eddie," he says, "is the latest statement of your finances. It has been a struggle for you, but always upward. I congratulate you, Eddie. Today you are a millionaire!"

I take the statement and gaze at the final figure. One million dollars! While I have been busy building a career, my savings and investments have been busy too, growing in safety and size. In 1924 I won the first prize in a letter contest conducted by a business magazine for the best answer to the question, "What is your bank doing for you and your community?" What better answer could I give than this financial statement? The Manufacturers Trust Company was awarded the banking-service cup and richly merited this distinction.

Plans are now fully under way for my new home. Tunneling for the foundation is well under way and soon the walls will begin to rise. The architect and workmen are constantly on the grounds. The other morning I heard loud blasts and the harsh clatter of derricks scooping up rocks. It disturbed my sleep and I was about to swear at the builders. But then I realized it was my own home they were making the racket about. I went back to sleep with a blissful smile.

The new house will have every improvement, including ceilings, floors, and a motion-picture theater. I am

still wondering about a name. I don't know whether to call my new home "The House That Ziegfeld's Jack Built" or "The Cantor Home for Girls."

And now that you have heard the story of my life, let me add the final word—it has just begun.

THE END

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